

**Artforum • Öyvind Fahlström • Meghan Dailey • 17 March 2003**

## **Öyvind Fahlström**

Meghan Dailey

Since his untimely death at the age of forty-seven, Öyvind Fahlström (1928–76) has gradually gained a wide audience and is now a firmly established presence, rather than just a perennially rediscovered subject of the occasional retrospective. His output was tremendously varied: poetry, manifestos, performance, and installations, as well as painting and sculpture. The current show at Feigen focuses on his engaging graphic works, including some of his enamel-on-metal pieces, which feature magnetic elements that can sometimes be manipulated like tokens in a board game. Fahlström's iconography—a unique amalgam of cartoons, abstract scumbles, cartography, pre-Columbian symbolism, Pop logos, and passages that suggest the idiosyncracies of Paul Klee and surrealism—crowds into the works' margins. Often the viewer is required to read as much as look, and so this small but substantial show feels just right.

Some observers of Fahlström's career have commented that his potential for wide renown in his own time was compromised by his politics (here, we see his withering gaze turned on the likes of Nixon and Kissinger). His orientation was quite different from that of his American Pop contemporaries and that of the European artists, such as Marcel Broodthaers, to whom he is frequently compared. Despite his dense visual language, Fahlström was committed to a kind of public address: Like many politically minded and utopian artist-thinkers before him, he wanted to use mass-media techniques to disseminate something more valuable than the rhetoric of capitalism and the status quo. Maybe that's why his work feels so relevant right now.