

# VENUS MANHATTAN

## Öyvind Fahlström

September 24 – October 26, 2019

Opening: Tuesday, September 24<sup>th</sup>, 6:00 - 8:00 pm

## Venus Over Manhattan

980 Madison Avenue

New York, NY 10075

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:



Öyvind Fahlström, *Sitting...Blocks*, 1965-1966



Portrait of Öyvind Fahlström by Jack Mitchell



Öyvind Fahlström, *Sitting...Blocks*, 1965-1966

(New York, NY) – **Venus Over Manhattan** is pleased to announce an exhibition of work by **Öyvind Fahlström**, organized in collaboration with **Sharon Avery-Fahlström**, **The Öyvind Fahlström Foundation**, and **Aurel Scheibler**. The exhibition marks the first solo presentation of Fahlström's work in New York in nearly fifteen years. Comprising Fahlström's signature variable paintings, sculptures, works on paper, and multiples, the presentation also marks the New York debut of the restoration of *Mao-Hope March*, Fahlström's 16mm black-and-white film from 1966, restored by The Museum of Modern Art in cooperation with The Öyvind Fahlström Foundation. In conjunction with the exhibition, *Venus Over Manhattan* will publish a major catalogue featuring new texts by Robert Storr and Sharon Avery-Fahlström, as well as an article by Peter Bratt. The exhibition will be on view from September 24<sup>th</sup> through October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

Often associated with the emergence of Pop art in Europe and the United States, Öyvind Fahlström died in 1976 at the age of 47, leaving behind a prodigious body of work that encompasses major contributions to painting, sculpture, drawing, poetry, criticism, journalism, and performance. Formally elaborate and rigorously innovative, Fahlström's work in all media is bound by a desire to enlist the viewer's active participation, a desire reflected in his early work in concrete poetry, his later variable paintings and sculptures, and his abiding interest in the rules and structures of games. Born in São Paulo to Scandinavian parents in 1928, Fahlström was sent to visit relatives in Sweden in 1939, but the outbreak of World War II prevented his return home to Brazil. Fahlström spent his young adult life in Stockholm, where he finished school, became a frequent contributor to the Swedish press, began making art, and published the first defense of concrete poetry. In 1961, Fahlström received a grant from the American-Scandinavian Foundation to live in New York, and he moved into a studio formerly occupied by Robert Rauschenberg at 128 Front Street, a building where Jasper Johns still lived. Closely associated with Rauschenberg and Johns, as well as Claes Oldenburg, Billy Klüver, and other artists associated with E.A.T., Fahlström participated in *9 Evenings: Theater and Engineering* with an elaborate multimedia performance titled *Kisses Sweeter than Wine*. Fahlström's performance included *Mao-Hope March*, in which the artist, his wife, and several artist friends march down Fifth Avenue with placards variously depicting Bob Hope and Mao Tse-Tung. Bob Fass, a WBAI radio personality, recorded responses to the question "Are you happy?" from passers-by, which serve as the film's soundtrack. By 1973, Fahlström showed *Mao-Hope March* as an independent work, and this exhibition marks the New York debut of its restoration.

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980 Madison Avenue

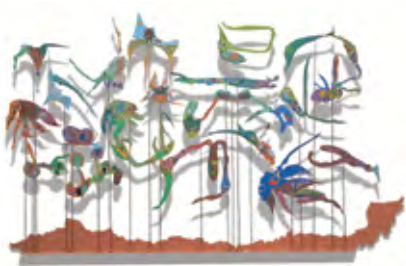
New York, NY 10075



Öyvind Fahlström, *Mao-Hope March*, 1966



Öyvind Fahlström, *Sitting...Dominoes*, 1966



Öyvind Fahlström, *Packing the Hard Potatoes (Chile 1: Last Months of the Allende Regime. Words by Plath and Lorca)*, 1974

The exhibition presents two groups of work Fahlström produced after moving to New York. The first group features major examples from the *Sitting...* series, begun in January 1962, and which led to his first variable painting, *Sitting...Six months later*. The series "marked the moment in his career when he came closest to merging writing and visual art into an alternative hybrid."<sup>1</sup> Each work employs a collection of pictograms, or "character-signs," that remain constant for the duration of the series. Fahlström cataloged these character-signs in a glossary, *Sitting...Directory*, which features a hand-drawn page for each character-sign, and will be on view in the gallery. Fahlström's first variable sculpture, *Sitting...Blocks* – exhibited here in New York for the first time since 1993 – comprises a group of ten hand-painted blocks which feature compositions of Fahlström's character-signs. First exhibited at the Sidney Janis Gallery in 1967, and later presented at the MCA Chicago's inaugural exhibition and documenta IV, Fahlström intended for the blocks to be shown in a series of preferred arrangements, thus changing their composition and narrative. Also on view are two versions of *Sitting...Dominoes*, works in which Fahlström applied the character-signs of *Sitting...* to the format of dominoes, the most popular board game in Brazil.

The second group of works date from the period starting in 1972, when Fahlström's work began to include information about world events. The largest work on view, *Packing the Hard Potatoes (Chile 1: Last Months of the Allende Regime. Words by Plath and Lorca)*, is a wall-hung, painted-steel shelf cut in the shape of Chile's map outline, onto which are positioned twenty spring wires with magnetic bases, each carrying a hand-painted element. The work's title refers to a line from one of Sylvia Plath's final poems, and presents a vision of the tumult leading up to the coup that deposed Salvador Allende, Chile's first democratically elected socialist leader. Also on view are a series of brightly colored prints packed with information, which Fahlström conceived as visual equivalents to his newspaper columns. *Column no. 1 (Wonder Bread)*, *Column no. 2 (Picasso 90)*, *Column no. 3 (Chile-F)*, and *Column no. 4 (IB-affair)*, document complex geopolitical scenarios through interlocking forms and figures. *Elements from "Masses"*, his last work from 1976, incorporates silhouetted figures magnetically attached to a backing board, which refer to the United States' involvement in Latin America.

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1. Antonio Sergio Bessa, *Öyvind Fahlström: The Art of Writing* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 92.

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Öyvind Fahlström, *Column no. 2 (Picasso 90)*, 1973



Öyvind Fahlström, *Column no. 4 (IB-affair)*, 1974

### ABOUT ÖYVIND FAHLSTRÖM

Öyvind Fahlström was born to Scandinavian parents in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1928. His work has been the subject of numerous solo presentation both stateside and abroad, including exhibitions at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), North Adams; BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead; Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA); Centro Studi sull'arte Fondazione Ragghianti – Complesso monumentale di San Michele, Lucca; Institute d'Art Contemporain, Villeurbanne; Norrköpings Konstmuseum; the University of Illinois at Chicago; Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne; IVAM/Centre Julio González, Valencia; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and Moderna Museet, Stockholm. Fahlström's work is frequently featured in major group exhibitions, including recent presentations at Kunstverein Hamburg; the Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Ludwig Forum Aachen; MUMOK, Vienna; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Pérez Art Museum, Miami; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The 32<sup>nd</sup> Bienal de São Paulo; Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA); Tate Modern, London; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and Museo Nacional de Centro Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid. In 1966, Fahlström represented Sweden at the Biennale di Venezia. His work was included in documenta IV, VI, and X. Fahlström's work is held in numerous public collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago; The Bronx Museum of the Arts; the Brooklyn Museum; Centre Pompidou, Paris; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk; Museo Nacional de Centro Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA); The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Fahlström lived and worked in Stockholm, Rome, Paris, and New York before his death in Stockholm in 1976.

For further information about the exhibition and availability, please contact the gallery at [info@venusovermanhattan.com](mailto:info@venusovermanhattan.com)

For all press inquiries related to the exhibition, please email [press@venusovermanhattan.com](mailto:press@venusovermanhattan.com)