

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

*Richard Forster: Levittown*

September 17 – November 12, 2016

Opening reception: Saturday, September 17, 6–8 pm

Artist's talk at 7 pm

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce Richard Forster's second show with the gallery—an exhibition of drawings, wallpaper, and a neon installation—called *Levittown*.

Richard Forster's research-based practice revolves around three places: Levittown, the former German Democratic Republic, and his hometown of Saltburn-by-the-Sea in northeast England. This geographic triangulation provides Forster with a framework for exploring the contradictory tensions between the individual and the community. Forster's interest is both academic and deeply personal.

"Photocopy realism" is a term Forster coined to describe his style of drawing. His graphite drawings are often mistaken for photographs, but their source images are actually *photocopies* of photographs, made with various copiers at multiple copy centers. Back in his drawing studio, Forster faithfully reproduces—by hand—the unique imperfections and artifacts each photocopier introduces to the original images: sharp contrast between deep blacks and bright whites, banding from low toner levels, scratches on the glass of the machine. This approach to making images blurs the boundary between mechanical and manual reproduction.

## LEVITTOWN

Drawing from photocopies seems a particularly fitting strategy for a project about Levittown, the first mass-produced suburb in the United States. William Levitt built more than 15,000 affordable, identical homes in Long Island between 1947 and 1951 to meet the surge in demand for housing as veterans returned home from World War II. Each house took less than 20 minutes to erect, cost less than \$8,000, came with a built-in television, and required no down payment. The capitalistic American Dream was attainable by nearly all. (This was true as long as aspiring homeowners were white. Despite being Jewish himself, Levitt would not sell to blacks or Jews.) Levittown shaped how we would come to think about suburbia, with its rows upon rows of indistinguishable houses with white picket fences and manicured lawns.

Forster depicts Levittown with four sets of drawings. Each set is a different color and consists of nine aerial views of the town laid out in a 3x3 grid. A set's center drawing is of two images—a distant, impersonal, aerial view underneath a family-album snapshot of a Levittown resident standing in front of his or her home.

The four colors of these grids come from "Little Boxes," Malvina Reynolds's 1962 song satirizing suburbia:

There's a green one and a pink one  
and a blue one and a yellow one,  
and they're all made out of ticky-tacky  
and they all look just the same.

And the people in the houses  
all went to university,  
where they were put in boxes

and they came out all the same.  
And there's doctors and lawyers,  
and business executives,  
and they're all made out of ticky-tacky  
and they all look just the same.

## **FORMER GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC (EAST GERMANY)**

The gallery wall on which the Levittown grids hang is covered with wallpaper Forster designed, based on a vintage pattern from East Germany. This design points to Forster's interest in *ostalgie*, a German portmanteau of the words *ost* (east) and *nostalgie* meaning "nostalgia for the former German Democratic Republic." Although no one wants the reinstatement of a surveillance state run by a repressive dictatorial regime, unemployment and homelessness in Germany today leave some feeling nostalgic for a time when the communist government provided housing and jobs for everyone.

A handful of gift shops and restaurants in Berlin commodify this sentiment, offering tchotchkes widely available before 1989 that became nearly impossible to find after reunification.

By using his wallpaper in the context of this exhibition, Forster is bringing Levittown and East Germany into direct conversation with each other, especially in regard to individualism, capitalism, and communism.

## **SALTBURN-BY-THE-SEA**

The third place of relevance in Forster's practice, his hometown, comes into play with his three-part seascapes. He takes three photos with a Praktica camera (a brand from the former GDR) of the edge of the sea over the course of about a minute. He makes these photographs from the same pier in Saltburn-by-the-Sea and captures the edge of the tide as it bisects the picture-frame like a Barnett Newman zip. One never knows if the tide in his drawings is advancing or retreating.

And because Forster always draws the same sea—the one he grew up with—it lends a degree of personalization to the academic abstractness of his other work. The suburb of Saltburn-by-the-Sea is not unlike Levittown: a cookie-cutter community designed for middle-class working people. But iron mining was the dominant industry in the Saltburn of Forster's youth, and the ideals of the Socialist Workers Party were well-favored. Forster's drawings are evidence of his reckoning with his own individuality in a community in which he does not feel entirely at home. This balancing act is a subtle and complex affair, perhaps similar to the feelings of some people living in Germany, Levittown, and elsewhere around the world.

Richard Forster, born in 1970 in Saltburn-by-the-Sea, England, lives and works in Darlington, England. Forster has had solo exhibitions at the De La Warr Pavilion (England), FLAG Art Foundation (New York), Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (England), and Whitworth Art Gallery (England). He has also shown at the Drawing Center (New York), Tate Britain (London), and Weatherspoon Art Museum (North Carolina). Forster's work is owned by the FLAG Art Foundation (New York), Lodeveans Collection (London), Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), and Zabłudowicz Collection (London).