



**Karl Erickson**, *Louie XIV*, acrylic yarn and canvas mesh, 72" x 48", 2008.  
Courtesy Robert Wedemeyer.

## *Karl Erickson and Andrew Falkowski: Age of Empires*

Kristi Engle Gallery, 5002 York Boulevard, Los Angeles

**S**eeing only two pieces on a single wall can make a gallery visitor a bit nervous on the way in, but Karl Erickson and Andrew Falkowski's nostalgically reimagined portraits of Louis XIV and Napoleon are each powerful on their own — and were even more so as a pair. As a result this show made empires of any age seem as fun as they are interesting.

Erickson's take on Louis XIV is a latch-hooked yarn rendering, hanging with a sag, of Rigaud's portrait of the king, suggesting fine tapestry and '70s shag. The image is pixelated, the face blurred by pasty pink and green fingers of yarn; the background has been replaced with an abstract red and orange swirl. The opulence of Louis's furs and silks has been overtaken by the tacky glamour of the pastels Erickson uses to shade the king's white-stockinged legs. Erickson's process allows those legs, and the downright lewd posture they support, to reveal themselves as advertisements for the lush desirability of power.

Falkowski's Napoleon is based on David's depiction of the soon-to-be emperor's trek across the Alps. That painting, showing a gold-and-blue-wrapped Napoleon Bonaparte on a massive white warhorse, draws the eye up and to the left, following the subject's index finger toward glory. Falkowski has distorted and rotated the image so that everything is pointing straight down. It's all pink, and the all-caps phrase "I FEEL LIKE I WIN WHEN I LOSE" tumbles down the canvas in crooked purple. This wittily ambiguous lyric comes from ABBA's disco-pop monster hit "Waterloo," where it rides a crescendo before crashing into an exuberant chorus about hopeless romance. In upside-down context, Napoleon looks almost bitterly smitten.

— Paul Rand