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**Leon Golub, "This Day Is Ours"**  
**Ronald Feldman Fine Arts,**  
**through Sat 6**  
**(see Soho).**

A handpainted roadside sign is propped up in the foreground of Leon Golub's canvas *Bite Your Tongue* (2001). A dense, white square, with neat, black lettering, it reads IN THE HISTORY OF ART LATE WORKS ARE THE CATASTROPHES and then gives us the author and date of these uncannily contemporary words:

ADORNO, 1937. For Golub, whose subject has always been, in one form or another, catastrophe, Adorno's quote carries a personalized ring. Golub is 79 years old, he's painted through wars and crises and political turmoil. He now enters his own period of "late work" at the same time that politics itself has perhaps entered an uncomfortable "lateness." In Golub's current exhibition at Ronald Feldman, the themes of the day coalesce in ways both personal and historical, corporeal and anxiously metaphysical.

As evidenced by Golub's retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum this past summer, politics can be ideologically mapped as relations of force among people. In this sense, Golub's genius for pointing to the overarching, banal repetition of human cruelty hasn't gone away. Although in 1980 his canvases were isolations and magnifications of the bristling male soldier and unbridled bloodlust, his contemporary images still inflect these tropes with the same allu-



**Leon Golub, *Bite Your Tongue*, 2001.**

sions to allegory and myth he explored early in his career. *This Day Is Ours* (1999) features a white man clutching an upturned pistol, his flesh and bones sundered in a Dionysian dismemberment; a black man with raised fist, screaming at the sky; and a cartoonlike sketch of two skeletons toasting their good fortune.

Golub's continued interest in the degradation of the human condition risks sentimentality, sometimes brushing up against potentially embarrassing visual metaphors: Cerberus-style hellhounds, winged chimeras, glittering gold eagles and memento mori-style skulls. But his pairing of the mythic with the crude engenders a series of complicated political markers. Adorno's words inevitably come to mind again as we leave the gallery and contemplate the nature of our situation today—asking, perhaps, whether catastrophe arises from the simple fact that we are always late from the start.—*Johanna Burton*