

Andrew Falkowski, *This Ship is Filled with Rats*, 2017, cast molded acrylic gel and Flashe paint on canvas, 72" x 60"



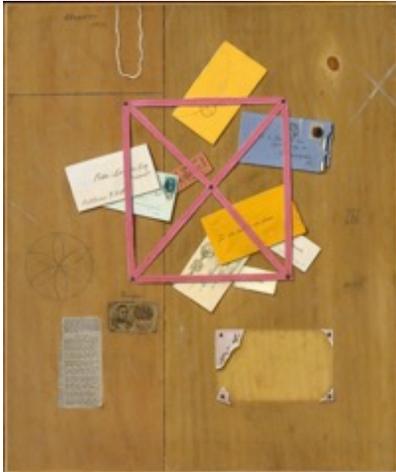
Andrew Falkowski, *All My Friends Are Dead*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 72" x 47"

## ***Two Paintings and Fake Tape***

--Anne Harris

This past December, I walked into Andrew Falkowski's studio and he handed me a piece of duct tape. But it wasn't. He'd made a mold of the actual thing to produce a spot-on replica—cast duct tape made from acrylic paint. The piece I held was silver gray, with the exact thickness and gloss and the same frayed edge as the real deal. The only give away—no sticky back. More of this fake tape had been collaged into an ongoing painting hanging on his studio wall. This was entirely assembled from fabricated elements, a painting facsimile made of paint but *not painted*.

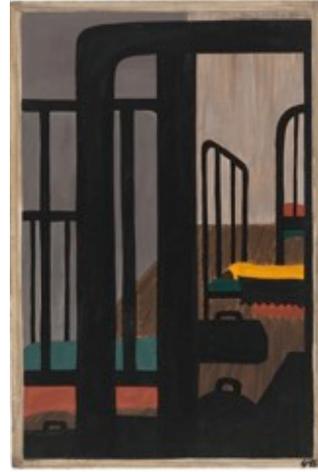
Without Andrew's material prompt, I would have missed this procedural-back-flip. Visually, the piece read like a graphic poster, with bright flat primary colors (featuring school bus yellow), blocky geometric letter forms, and of course, duct-tape-silver. The only disruption to design came from the painting's physicality—cut-out shapes bluntly layered. Stylistically, it smacked of early American modernism, particularly Stuart Davis's text collages.



William Harnett, *The Artist's Letter Rack*, 1879, oil on canvas, 30" x 25"

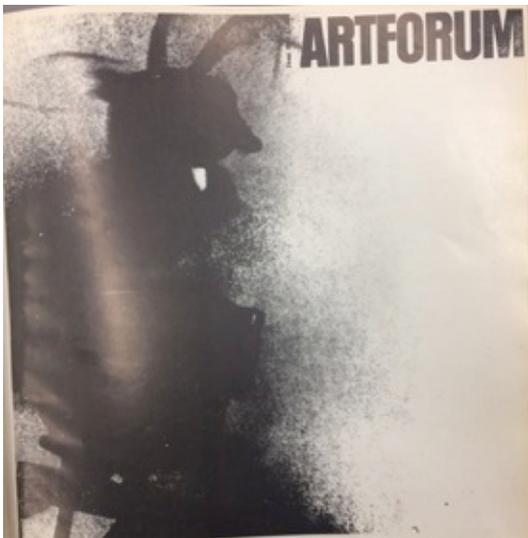


Stuart Davis, *Fin*, 1962-64, casein and masking tape on canvas

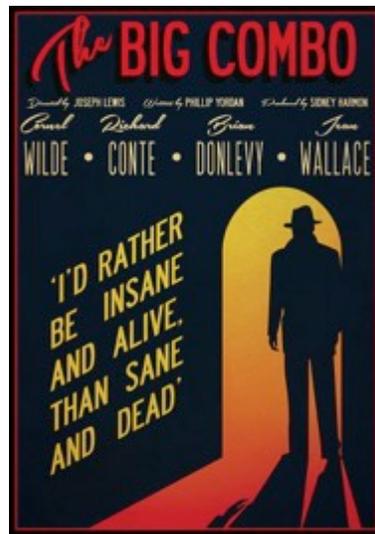


Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration Series*, 1940-41, casein tempera on hardboard, 18" x 12"

This first piece conversed with the other painting in the room, which was about the same size (six feet tall), with a similar flatly layered aesthetic and more block letters. It also had the look of collage, but this was illusion. Shadows and slips of layered "paper" were rendered seamlessly in paint to create the sensation of depth. Color moved in and out of perceived space, set off predominately by grays. The painting was a shallow three-dimensional fiction. This too read as distinctly American—referencing our trompe l'oeil virtuosos and pictorial modernists, from William Harnett to Charles Demuth. We can also see a connection to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century narrative work—particularly the geometric stylizations, precise use of color and spatial construction found in Jacob Lawrence.



*Artforum*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition cover, 1962



*The Big Combo*, poster, 1955

The text in both these paintings was assembled like ransom notes, varied typefaces pulled from sources, from *Artforum* to junk-mail. A bit of deciphering revealed their titles, *This Ship is Filled with Rats*, and *All My Friends Are Dead*, from existential horror-punk song lyrics by, respectively, the Murder City Devils and Turbonegro. Here, language and style nod vigorously to Americana genres, entertainment and marketing strategies: pulp-fiction, film noir, dime-store detective novels, super-market tabloids, bulk advertising—our national tradition of attention-getting sensationalism.



Charles Demuth, *I Saw the Figure Five in Gold*, 1928, oil graphite, ink and gold leaf on paper-board, 35 ½" x 30"

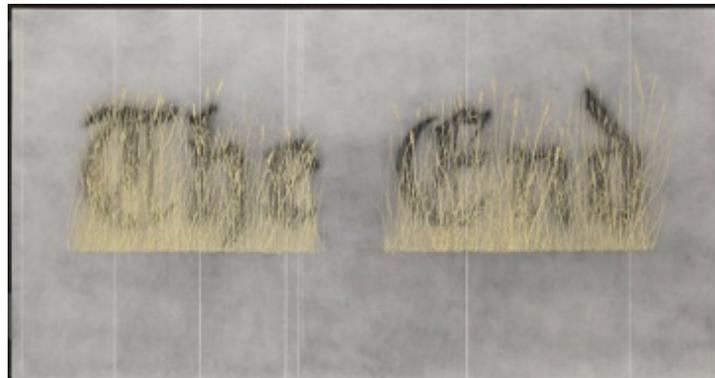


Robert Indiana, *Decade: Autoportrait*, 1961, 1972-77, oil on canvas, 72" x 72"

These of course relate to the history of text in painting, by artists already mentioned here as well as pop and contemporary masters, from Roy Lichtenstein to Robert Indiana to Ed Ruscha. And this all can be linked to current American politics—the abrupt dismal shift in values, the exposure of a national schism. This, Andrew refers to as “so goddamned dark.”



Roy Lichtenstein, *M-Maybe he became ill and he couldn't leave the studio*, 1965, silkscreen, 22.8" x 22.8"



Ed Ruscha, *The Final End*, 1992, acrylic on canvas, 70" x 138"

Andrew's work can generally be discussed in terms of conceptual layering. Material, language, pictorial strategies and cultural references function as strata—layers of meaning intended to build and contradict. Collage is a metaphor. We flip back and forth between literal and illusion, concealment and revelation. Nothing is at it seems, but nothing hides what it is, except... that's not true, right? It absolutely hides and disguises to the point that we need a materials list to understand that we're being fooled. Goofy, smart, funny, serious and bleak, the cascade of references can become overwhelming. My initial reaction was to question whether I was seeing exponential inventiveness or a display of facility. Was Andrew a brilliant smart-ass? Was this extensive cultural dissection inviting or excluding?

My eventual conclusion: both. And that contradiction is key to the work. Overall, it's a referential pile-up of satire—a pastiche of our never-enough more-is-more hierarchical status-conscious indulgent materialistic culture. The feeling I feel is doubt. Not in the work, but in myself. My uneasiness has to do with my lack of firm footing, trying to “keep up,” while also knowing that there's no satisfaction in “getting it.” I realize I'm missing sentiment—this work insists on addressing meaning and depth through surface aspects. No matter how many layers are included, each is another surface. In this, it is truly ironic. When establishing our position in the world, we self-categorize and self-define based on cultural context and awareness. Within that, we distinguish and precisely “fit” through representative tastes in music, entertainment, clothes, décor, etc. That is, we define ourselves by presenting surfaces. Our inclination to display is then manipulated by market forces. Mashed together, in Andrew's work, it all becomes a flattened dystopic mirror. Here, our reflections are reduced to posturing.



Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917, replica 1964



Maurizio Cattelan, *America*, 2016, solid 18k gold, replica of Kohler toilet

Just as these paintings are cultural commentary, *painting* itself is political. It's public and overarching. Like all art, it's part of our economy, a signifier of status that shapes and is shaped by culture, and that represents and reflects our society. It traffics in the common currency of fiction, plays with truth and harnesses universal perceptions. In this respect all elements, including the use of illusion and representation, can be interpreted. Cast duct tape can be linked to Duchamp's *Fountain*, Vija Celmins's *Comb*, to Maurizio Cattelan's *America*, the 18k gold toilet recently offered by the Guggenheim to the White House (in lieu of a Van Gogh), and also to Scott Reeder's *Real Fake*, installed last year on the Chicago Riverwalk, within site-line of Trump Tower.



Vija Celmins, *Untitled (Comb)*, 1970, enamel on wood, 75" x 15 5/8" x 2 3/8"



Scott Reeder, *Real Fake*, 2013, fiberglass and metallic paint, 6' x 8' x 3'

So, we understand Andrew's two pieces as political commentary, and yet, they are paintings. Unlike say, the two toilets mentioned above, they're made by the artist, by hand. Their making is personal. Their perception by us is best done in person. They invite singular interactions between unique beings—a painting and a person. An individual painting exists individually in the world and has individual presence. This is perceived by us not just as image and idea but as physical fact. The tangible play in these—the painting games between surface material and painted illusion, between fact and fiction—can be understood as Andrew's personal pleasure and as sensory attraction for us. We're all seduced by the luxury of illusion and the sensuality of transformed material.

In this respect, these paintings offer us ancient magic: transformation. We believe that paint is now tape. Whether physically replicated or illusionistically described, we're believers. We see space where there's none. We see subject where there's none. Andrew turns paint into tape, and then turns tape into art. Focusing on this one aspect (out of so many), he joins a lineage of artists who use tape as tool, material, pictorial device and subject. And with them he declares allegiance to the paradox of painting—that facts are fiction and fictions are fact, and we sincerely believe that both are true.



Detail: Robert Rauschenberg, *Winter Pool*, 1959, combine painting: oil, paper, fabric, wood, metal, sandpaper, tape, printed paper, printed reproductions, handheld bellows, and found painting, on two canvases, with ladder  
90 ½" x 59 ½" x 4"



Detail: Andrew Falkowski, *This Ship is Filled with Rats*, 2017, cast molded acrylic gel and Flashe paint on canvas, 72" x 60"

**Post script:** My studio-visit with Andrew occurred December 18, 2017, in preparation for his solo exhibition, *Flat Earth*, which begins today. At that time, we discussed in depth the two paintings focused on here, which are the anchors for this show. Artists however are full of surprises. Between then and now, Andrew painted another large painting. Although formally akin—also text, also collage—its intent is different. This one is about love.

The last big painting is from Gerry Rafferty: *Right Down the Line*. 70's easy listening at its finest. It's a love letter to my wife, Amy. There's a big black line that cuts the picture down the middle vertically. It's the only thing that touches the edges of the frame. It's a direct 'Line', mirroring the song. A spine, an anchor, or a ZIP of sorts. So it's pretty sentimental....

--Andrew Falkowski, January 27, 2018 (via email to Anne Harris)



Andrew Falkowski, *Self Titled (It Was You)*, acrylic modeling paste, cast molded acrylic, Flash, oil pastel, burlap, canvas, 62" x 42"

### ***About the Artist:***

Andrew Falkowski lives in Wilmette, IL and teaches at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He received his BFA from the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1995, and his MFA from the California Institute of the Arts in 2003. His work has been exhibited at venues ranging from Rosamund Felsen Gallery (Los Angeles), to Mixed Greens Gallery (NYC), to Chicago galleries such as Andrew Rafacz, Kavi Gupta and Julius Caesar, as well as The Suburban (both Oak Park and Milwaukee). Falkowski's work has been discussed and reviewed in such publications as *Time Out*, *Chicago Art Magazine*, and *Artforum.com*. His art criticism and essays have appeared in publications such as *New Art Examiner*, *Cakewalk Magazine* and *Shifter Magazine*. He is now currently a contributing writer to *Chicago Artist Writers* and *New City Art Online*.

### ***About the Curator:***

Anne Harris lives in Riverside, IL and teaches at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She received her BFA from Washington University in St. Louis in 1986 and her MFA from the Yale School of Art in 1988. Her work has been exhibited at venues ranging from Alexandre Gallery (NYC), DC Moore Gallery (NYC), and Nielsen Gallery (Boston), to the National Portrait Gallery at the Smithsonian Institute, The Portland Museum of Art, The California Center for Contemporary Art and the North Dakota Museum of Art. Her work is in such public collections as The Fogg Museum at Harvard, The Yale University Art Gallery and The New York Public Library. She is the recipient of such awards as the Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, the NEA Individual Artist Fellowship, and most recently, an Honorary Doctorate from the Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts, University of New Haven. Harris serves on the board of the Riverside Arts Center and is Chair of their Exhibition Committee. This is the 15<sup>th</sup> exhibition she has curated for the RAC.

Gallery Hours: Tue-Sat, 1-5pm. Closed Sundays, Mondays and major holidays.

All of our exhibitions are free and open to the public.

For additional information, visit [www.riversideartscenter.com](http://www.riversideartscenter.com) or contact Freeark Gallery Director Claudine Isé at [cise\[at\]riversideartscenter.com](mailto:cise[at]riversideartscenter.com).

This exhibition is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; the Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelley Foundation; and sponsorship from the Riverside Township.

