

SYNDICATES: ANDREW WITKIN (AMONG OTHERS) at the University of New Hampshire Museum of Art



Andrew Witkin,, *Syndicates*, 1992 – 2018, multi-element installation, courtesy of James Harris Gallery, Seattle and Theodore:Art, Brooklyn.

Nothing in Andrew Witkin's *Syndicates* is labeled, in keeping with the artist's practice of making sense (or not) of partial information by foregrounding subtexts, patterns and chance. An obsessive archivist, Witkin sources and curates *Syndicates* in a way that facilitates non-hierarchical correspondences and indeterminate meanings.

Although the hybrid installation/exhibition comprises six elements stationed across a gallery floor, viewers move through the space unguided, encountering elegant, enigmatic constructions that feel mysteriously related, both internally and to each other.

On one wall are 13 geometric collages consisting of shrink-wrapped newspaper and magazine photographs. Witkin has positioned the overlapping images along the axis where the photos were interrupted by the periodical's 'gutter,' the empty space along the fold. Each assemblage hints at an undisclosed order. Culled from the artist's personal archive, some of the groupings may all be photographs containing water, for example, or perhaps all come from the same day's edition.

Opposite the wall, a 400-foot-long bolt of periodically folded fabric spans a thin table. Odd deviations and mistakes in the linear pattern suggest time-stamped blips, recording a subtle oscillation between accident and intention. (In fact, Joe Salonis, a blind artisan Witkin worked with through the Brookline, MA Gateway Arts organization, shuttle-wove the fabric by hand.)

Language forms the bond between two pieces facing each other on opposite walls. In one work, Witkin has fused remnants of several large alphabetical stencil kits into a dense, clotted tapestry. Encased in white latex, the thickly textured lumps of overlapping letters suggest a subversion of language's function as a transparent medium of communication. A similar deformation of language into object takes place on the opposite wall, where a series of industrial felt strips repeat the word "mercy" along with various pronouns (I, me, you) until the words accumulate, via an undisclosed apparently aleatory process, into dense, illegible abstraction.

A rewarding function of this show is that it ends up illustrating how good art gets made: spun out from subjective personal experience through obsession, ordering, randomizing and repetition. The viewer's full mental participation is mandatory; each element (or "syndicate") involves components in series combined to form an intriguing, ambiguous whole.