



# DRIP-DROP-TICK-TOCK

SCULPTURE AND PAINTINGS BY JOSEPH FUCIGNA







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## **SCULPTURE AND PAINTINGS BY JOSEPH FUCIGNA**

Essay by Richard Klein

**HOUSATONIC MUSEUM OF ART**  
HOUSATONIC COMMUNITY COLLEGE

2018



# Good Fences: Recent Sculpture by Joseph Fucigna

Several miles from Joseph Fucigna's studio is the abandoned factory of the Gilbert & Bennett Company, in Georgetown, Connecticut. Founded in 1818, Gilbert & Bennett was the first enterprise in America to weave wire into screen, and in 1865 it was the first facility in the United States to use mechanical wire-twisting machines to make chicken wire. The proximity of Gilbert & Bennett to Fucigna's studio is purely coincidental, yet its existence points to the ubiquity of woven industrial fabrics, and how they are an ever-present, yet largely invisible part of material culture.



*Ceramic Figure*, 1978,  
clay and steel, 36 x 60 x 45"



*Steel Abstraction*, 1985,  
steel, 22 x 44 x 16"



*Rubber Overhang*, 1988,  
rubber and wood, 46 x 43 x 45"

For almost eighteen years, Fucigna has been using fencing materials such as steel hardware cloth, chicken wire, and the plastic fences used on ski trails, construction barriers and deer protection to make sculpture. So it might come as a surprise that the artist started out as a ceramicist

and steel sculptor before he settled on the use of manufactured industrial products. But throughout his career, there is a consistency to Fucigna's use of these seemingly unrelated materials.

Working in clay, Fucigna made slab-built objects, a technique that was readily transferred into the planar nature of steel plate. His first foray into synthetic materials was the use of flexible rubber from truck tire inner tubes, another material that is sheet-like and, like clay, allows for folding and manipulation. Although all of the man-made materials that the artist employs have obvious practical uses, Fucigna has never focused on their metaphorical potential as found objects. Rather, in Fucigna's hands, these utilitarian products transcend their original purposes. For instance, fencing is typically experienced as a planar barrier, but the artist, like a mad basket weaver, folds, bends, and layers the cumbersome stuff to make three-dimensional objects that often convey organic or figurative connotations. Fucigna's forms are so strong and unexpected that the original identity of the

materials is easily forgotten. The incorporation of contrasting layers of bright plastic fencing and colored cable ties further animates the surfaces like daubs of pigment on a pointillist painting. But Fucigna's past as a ceramicist has not been entirely left behind: if craft can be defined as a mastering of materials, he has become a virtuoso of the "weaving" of industrial fabrics, pushing the limits of what these materials will allow.

When manipulating clay and rubber, gravity is a constant concern, as these flexible substances respond by capitulating to its resolute force. Fucigna's work in this exhibition, made with fencing and therapy putty, similarly displays awareness of gravity, but in very different ways. Though the fencing pieces are elaborately shaped, they are remarkably strong and aren't naturally pliable, so their distorted forms are a result of the artist's intention. But the putty works record the involuntary, slow-motion creep of this strangely viscous material, as it is pulled toward the center of the earth. Fucigna became aware of the properties of putty when it was prescribed for his wife's hand therapy. He discovered that the material was really a semi-liquid, and left to its own devices would slowly slump, run, and drip like thick molasses. Instead of fighting gravity, the material invited him to work with it, its malleable quality assuming a natural place in the artist's process-driven oeuvre. The decidedly clay-like material points back to his early study of ceramics, while it also clearly relates to his current work with synthetic, industrially produced products. The multi-colored *Putty Drip* series (pages 10, 11, 20, 26) also relates to Fucigna's "drip" paintings made in 2015 and 2016. But where the paintings refer to dripping forms, the putty actually enacts the pull of gravity. While the paintings are static objects, the putty works are alive, changing and somewhat unpredictable. Painters such as Morris Louis (1912-1962) used the fluid nature of paint to make works that speak of gravity's tug, and sculptor Richard Serra (b. 1938) threw molten lead to cast the spaces where the floor meets the wall; but Fucigna's putty works are unique in that they are in a very real sense a slow-motion performance, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Relating directly to the artist's pendulous sculpture made out of fencing products, the *Putty Drips* embody the artist's interest in both process and the forces of nature.

Fucigna's awareness of gravity is also apparent in works such as *Big Drip*, 2013 (right). Composed of a series of distinct forms made



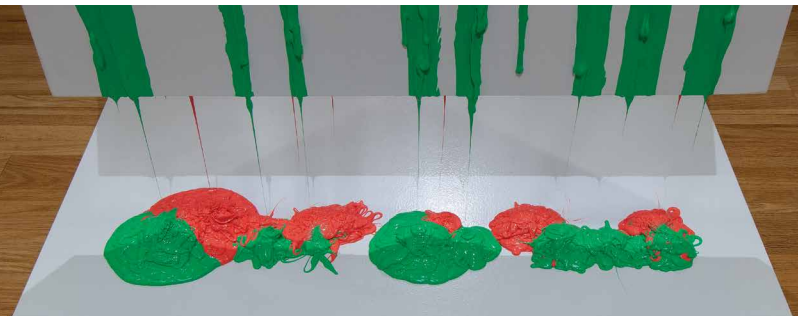
*Chute*, 1988,  
rubber and wood, 59 x 37 x 45"



*Big Drip*, 2013,  
plastic and metal fencing,  
79 x 46 x 46"



of layers of fencing piled on top of one another, the sculpture resembles—depending on one’s proclivities—either melting scoops of differently flavored ice cream or a composition of weirdly distorted sausages. The work references gravity in that the individual forms generally taper from their apexes and bulge toward their bottoms, while the whole “pile” seems to be teetering due to its provisional nature. The notion that the forms in Fucigna’s sculpture recall sausages is not so odd, in that the shapes are defined by their skins, just as the form of a sausage is determined by its casing. Of course, sausages are also gross simplifications of the human body—we are also bags of corporeal matter delineated by our skins. This is what makes Fucigna’s sculpture so approachable, despite its abstract nature: his objects are strangely like us.



Detail, *Putty Installation #2*

A different approach to gravity is found in the sculpture *Yellow\_Black\_White Drip*, 2017 (page 39). Mounted on the wall, the work is built off a plane of coarse steel hardware cloth that provides a sturdy foundation for the addition of plastic components. Like a candle that melts to reveal its wick, *Yellow\_Black\_White Drip* has cascading layers of yellow, black and

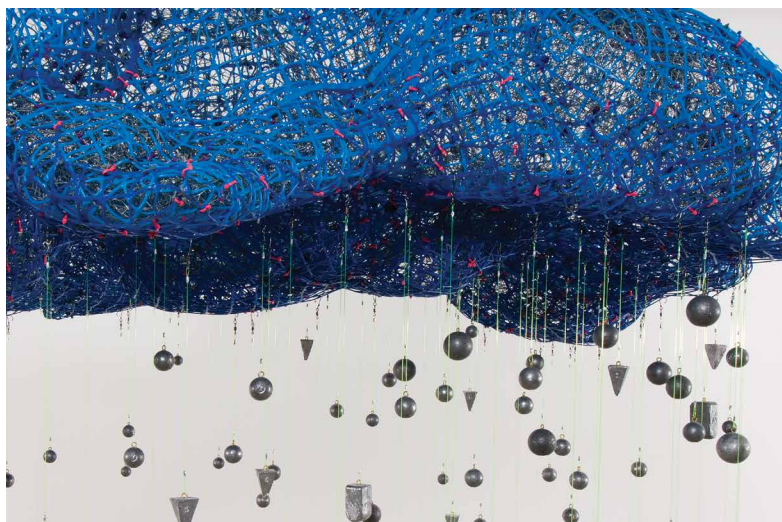
white synthetic fencing coming off its substrate, which become more bulbous as they descend, finally coming to rest on a level plane that hovers above the floor. Fucigna could have decided to have the work puddle onto the actual floor, but by raising it he makes it as much a painting as a sculpture. The space between the bottom of the sculpture and the floor provides an upward tension similar to that which exists beneath the ballooning form of a cumulus cloud on a hot summer day.

On occasion, Fucigna has made sculptures that hang from the ceiling, and although on one level they defy gravity, they also acknowledge it through dangling components that provide balance and stability. *Brainstorm*, 2010 (cover, pages 18, 30, 31) is a clotted, cloud-like form hung from one point on a steel cable that, as the title implies, is shadowed by a suspended shower of small lead fishing weights. The weights, however, are not just a decorative flourish, but are integral to keeping the work horizontal as they stabilize the form’s sprawling

nature. Once again, the sculpture, although abstract, is familiar due to the way it references both the body and nature. *Brainstorm's* extended form does vaguely recall the shape of a brain, even tapering at one end to a point that suggests the medulla oblongata. But the tangle of blue fencing points to another, important metaphorical aspect of the artist's work that is not so obvious: its woven, dense structural construction has parallels in the world of biology. A complex network of neurons defines the brain and nervous system, while layers of fibrous connective tissue are what hold the body together.

Fucigna's chosen materials—mesh fencing and cable ties—in a very real sense symbolize the connective tissue of the man-made world, and the way the artist utilizes these components mimics the way nature builds biological structures. Take, for instance, the work *High Five*, 2004 (page 15). A highly animated conglomeration of woven forms, when looked at objectively its visual character would not be out of place in a book illustrating microscopic plankton or diatoms. The end of the work's protruding "arm" bristles with a patch of blue cable ties that recall coral polyps extending from their calcareous exoskeletons. The dense layers of mesh-like materials that define Fucigna's sculpture allow them to be extremely lightweight for their size, with the strength of their construction based on the same engineering principles that are manifest in structures as varied as a geodesic dome or the woven nests of certain bird species. Fucigna does not create objects based on the direct observation of nature, rather he employs the natural laws he has discovered through a trial-and-error process of steady experimentation.

Since Fucigna started working with synthetic materials, color has become an increasingly important element. The range of colors in which polypropylene and polyethylene plastic mesh products are available is extensive. The artist began using cable ties at the same point he began working with fencing, primarily because they were the most direct and efficient way of securing the mesh materials.



Detail, *Brainstorm*



Detail, *Yellow\_Black\_White Drip*

Additionally, Fucigna embraces the aesthetic philosophy that form should follow function, so the cable ties clearly proclaim their utilitarian role of holding things together while they simultaneously harmonize pleasingly with the other bright, plastic materials. Happily, like plastic fencing, cable ties come in a spectrum of colors, and their judicious use allows Fucigna to add strategic colorful accents.

Fucigna's sculpture, while clearly abstract, opens itself to the world of lived experience. There is no mystery about how the artist makes his work—the construction is revealed through simple observation. The magic he generates comes through inventiveness of form, dynamic use of color, inventive craftsmanship and a corporeal sense of physicality. We are all being pulled toward the core of the earth, and in a very real sense life is defined by how gravity is overcome. Joseph Fucigna's work exists the way we do, halfway between the sky and the ground, animated by restless curiosity.

Richard Klein  
July 2018



Detail, *High Five*

A VIRTUOSO OF THE “WEAVING” OF  
INDUSTRIAL FABRICS, PUSHING  
THE LIMITS OF WHAT THESE  
MATERIALS WILL ALLOW

RK



1. *Red\_White Drape Drip*







2. Ant Farm 2





3. *Pink\_Gray Drip*

FUCIGNA DOES NOT CREATE OBJECTS  
BASED ON THE DIRECT OBSERVATION  
OF NATURE, RATHER HE EMPLOYS THE  
NATURAL LAWS HE HAS DISCOVERED  
THROUGH A TRIAL-AND-ERROR PROCESS  
OF STEADY EXPERIMENTATION

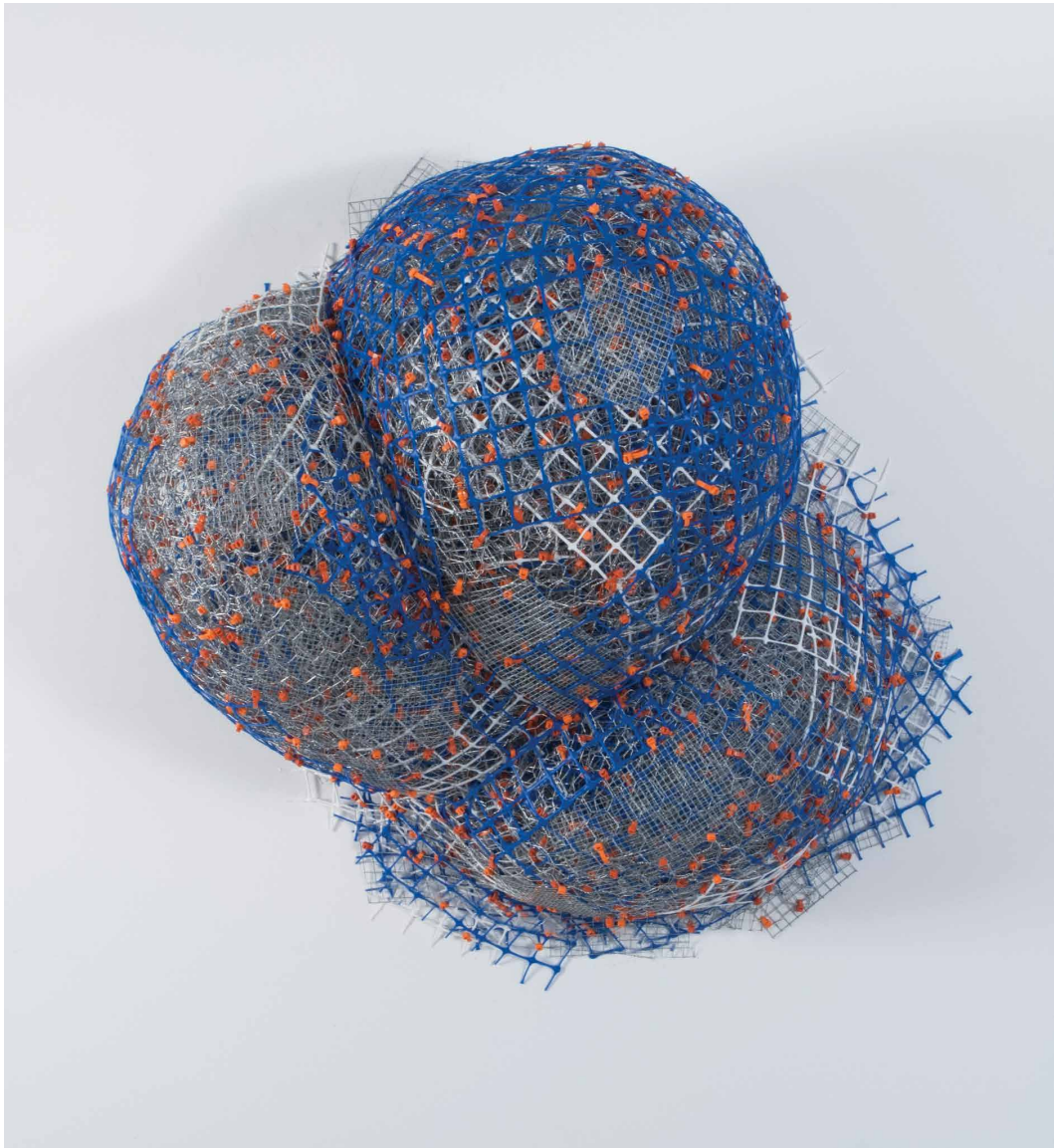
RK



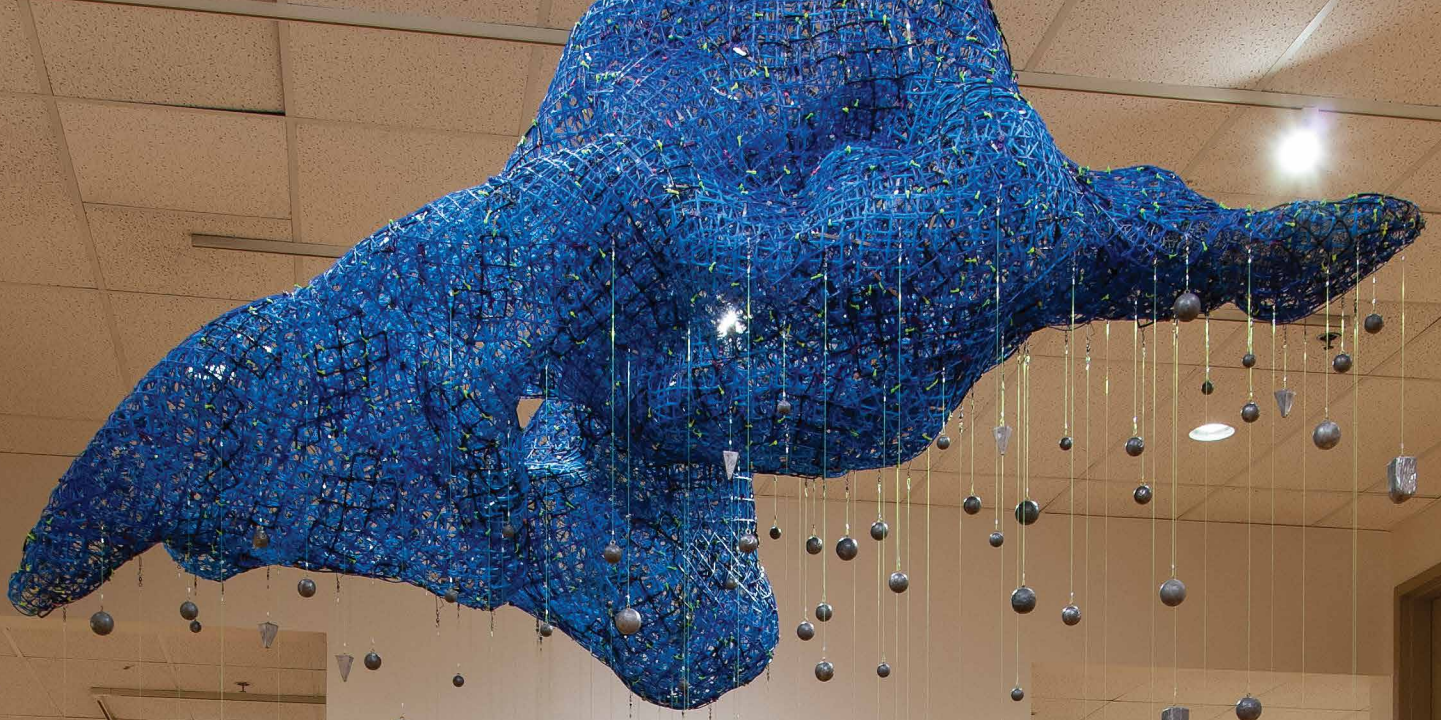
4. *High Five*



5. *Excitable Boy*

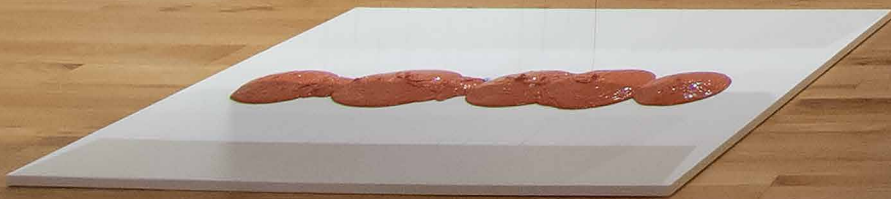


6. Cheeky

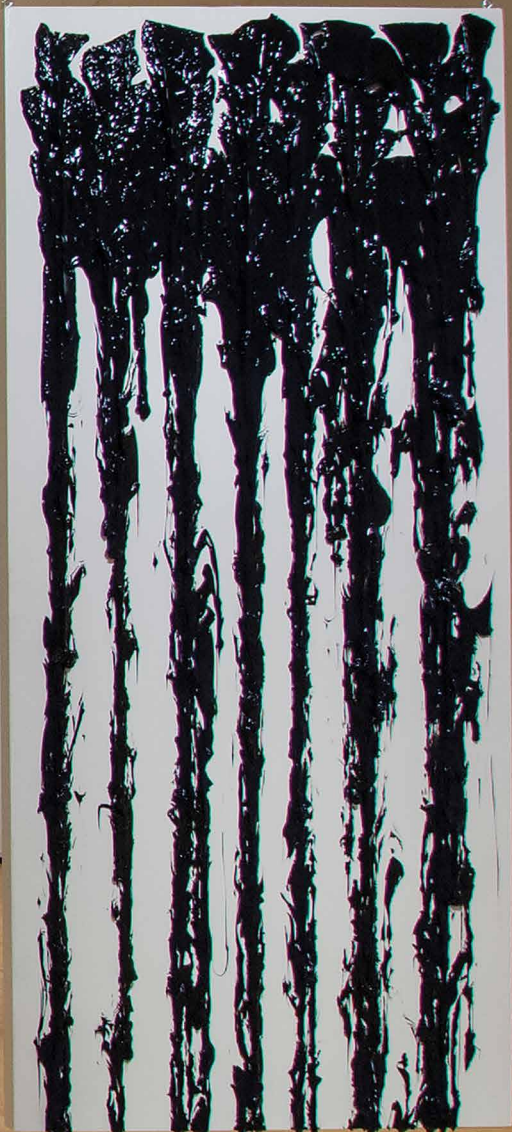




7. *Black and Blue*







FUCIGNA'S WORK EXISTS THE WAY  
WE DO, HALFWAY BETWEEN THE SKY  
AND THE GROUND, ANIMATED  
BY RESTLESS CURIOSITY

RK

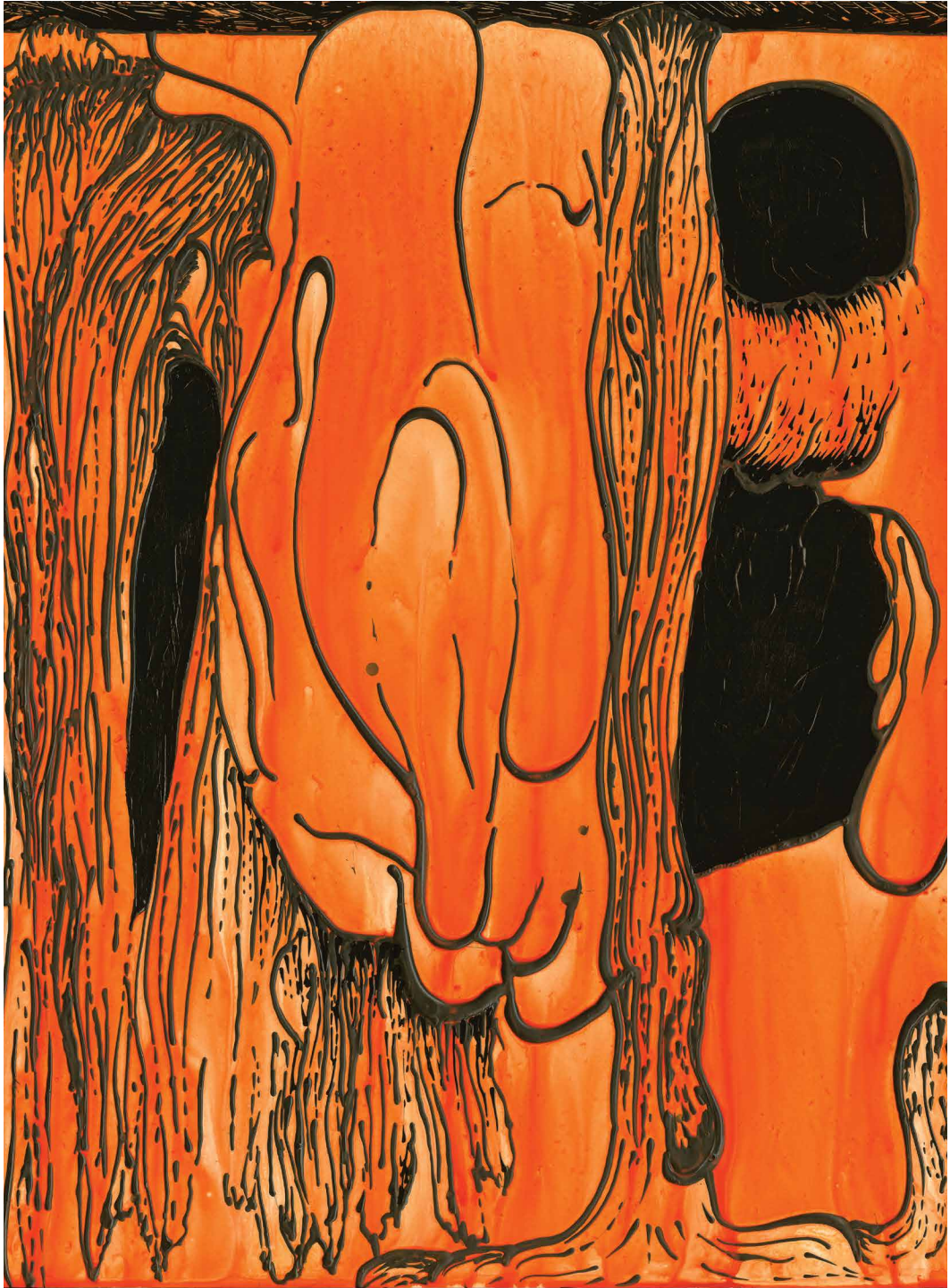
*Previous: 8. Putty Installation #2, Black, Yellow, Red, Green, Coral, Blue*



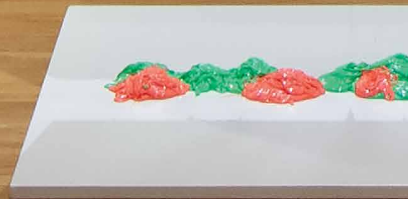
9. *Yellow\_White\_Orange Drip*

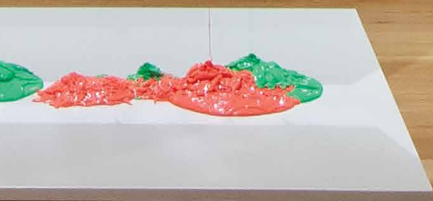


10. *Blue\_Gray Drip*



11. *Orange Drip*





FUCIGNA'S FORMS ARE SO  
STRONG AND UNEXPECTED THAT  
THE ORIGINAL IDENTITY OF THE  
MATERIALS IS EASILY FORGOTTEN

RK

Previous: 12. *Putty Installation #2, Black, Yellow, Red, Green, Coral, Blue*





13. *Dirty Laundry*





14. *Brainstorm*



15. *Ant Farm 1*



16. *Ant Farm 4*



17. *White\_Black Drip*



18. *White Drip*



19. *Red\_Gold Drip*





20. *Pink\_Lime Green Drip*





21. *Yellow\_Black\_White Drip*



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Photography on pages 9, 11, 18, 20, 23, 26 and 40 by Paul Mutino. Photograph on page 10 by Hyla Skopitz. All other photographs courtesy of Joseph Fucigna.



# About the Artist

Joseph Fucigna has been an active participant in the Connecticut art world since the mid- 1980s. Equally accomplished in many media, including clay, steel, and acrylic, Fucigna is known for his signature plastic-coated fencing material sculptures. He transforms this apparently inflexible material into large-scale biomorphic sculptures, and layered, seemingly molten wall hangings. Fucigna received his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Alfred University, School of Art & Design, NYS College of Ceramics, and his Master of Fine Arts degree from the School of Visual Arts in New York City. He has held the Professor of Art position at Norwalk Community College since 1993. To date, Fucigna has received twelve one-person exhibitions at museums and galleries throughout the world, and his work has been included in more than sixty group exhibitions in New England. The recipient of numerous awards, he has received the Molly and Albert Jacobson Award for Sculpture at the 62nd Art of the Northeast USA exhibition, the Paula N. Rhodes Memorial Scholarship at the School of Visual Arts, and he has twice been honored with Individual Art Fellowships by the Connecticut Commission for the Arts. Fucigna lives with his wife, Barbara in Weston, Connecticut.





# Acknowledgments

Like all art museum exhibitions, *Drip-Drop Tick-Tock: Sculpture and Paintings by Joseph Fucigna* and the related catalogue were collaborative efforts. Both required many experienced museum professionals, a devoted catalogue production team, and generous donors. Among all these very helpful people, I am especially grateful to Housatonic Museum of Art Director, Robbin Zella for her sage advice and careful oversight of all aspects of the the exhibition. Many thanks also to Courtney Linderman, Museum Collections Manager, and the entire Housatonic Museum staff for their attentive assistance during the preparation and installation phases. I extend my particular appreciation to Richard Klein, Director of Exhibitions at the The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum for his thorough and insightful essay, to Daphne Anderson Deeds, Museum Consultant for her astute editorial judgement, and to Ken Lalli, my Norwalk Community College colleague and proprietor of Xenos Design for his elegant catalogue design. The entire *Drip-Drop Tick-Tock* team appreciates Housatonic Community College for supporting the exhibition and catalogue and helping the arts to thrive throughout the campus, and to the Connecticut Office of the Arts, Department of Economic and Community Development, for funding the exhibition program at the Housatonic Museum of Art. Most importantly, I thank my wife, Barbara, my most loyal collaborator and discerning critic.

Joseph Fucigna  
September 2018



# Addendum

*Drip-Drop Tick-Tock* had an exhilarating, but brief history. Installed at the Housatonic Museum of Art in August, in anticipation of the public opening on 13 September 2018, the exhibition was curtailed when an electrical fire one floor above the museum created considerable water damage and parts of the museum ceiling collapsed. Forced to close the museum for repairs, Director Robbin Zella reluctantly announced that *Drip-Drop Tick-Tock* would have to be postponed. This catalogue has been published to document the beautiful, but short-lived installation and to celebrate Joseph Fucigna's career, which has reached an exciting and innovative crescendo.

Drip-Drop Tick-Tock  
Sculpture and Paintings by Joseph Fucigna

2018

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Cover: *Brainstorm*, 2010

Joseph Fucigna (b. 1956–)

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