

Art & Design

Review

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The Franks

“An Improbable Coincidence of Wants,” [Rowland Contemporary](#), through Oct 25.

What do Marilyn and Peter Frank—the Chicago-based art-and-design duo formerly known as F2—accomplish by gilding a spork?

They can't expect to top Tobias Wong and Ken Courtney's *Coke Spoon 02* (2005), a gold-plated reproduction of a McDonald's coffee stirrer (used as drug paraphernalia during the 1970s) that provoked an infamous lawsuit from the fast-food chain. And the Franks must realize that *Some Dangling Books*—a booklet of photographs of Ed Ruscha's 1960s booklets of photographs—doesn't have the same impact as Ruscha's *Thirtyfour Parking Lots or Various Small Fires*.



Untitled (Gold Spork), 2008.

The problem with invoking Wong, Ruscha, René Magritte—and even, as two paintings do, the late French historian Michel Foucault—is that the quotations drown out the Franks' own voices. Their four photographs of unintentionally poetic retail signage also echo Ruscha without adding anything new to his reframing of commercial banality. Their video *La Gazza Ladra* (2008) doesn't take advantage of its medium: The camera offers the same view of a pawnbroker's garish, brilliantly lit sign for almost three minutes, while music from Rossini's opera of the same title (which means “The Thieving Magpie”) plays in the background. (So, does this mean pawnbrokers are shady?)

The Franks are forthright about their homages; one piece, *Bones*, solely comprises a pair of quotation marks hung on the wall. But these talented artists should rely more on their unique expertise: The show's best works—a lovely, enigmatic hourglasslike sculpture and a mirror with hand-etched text—suggest that the Franks' years of design experience should have more influence on their art.

—Lauren Weinberg