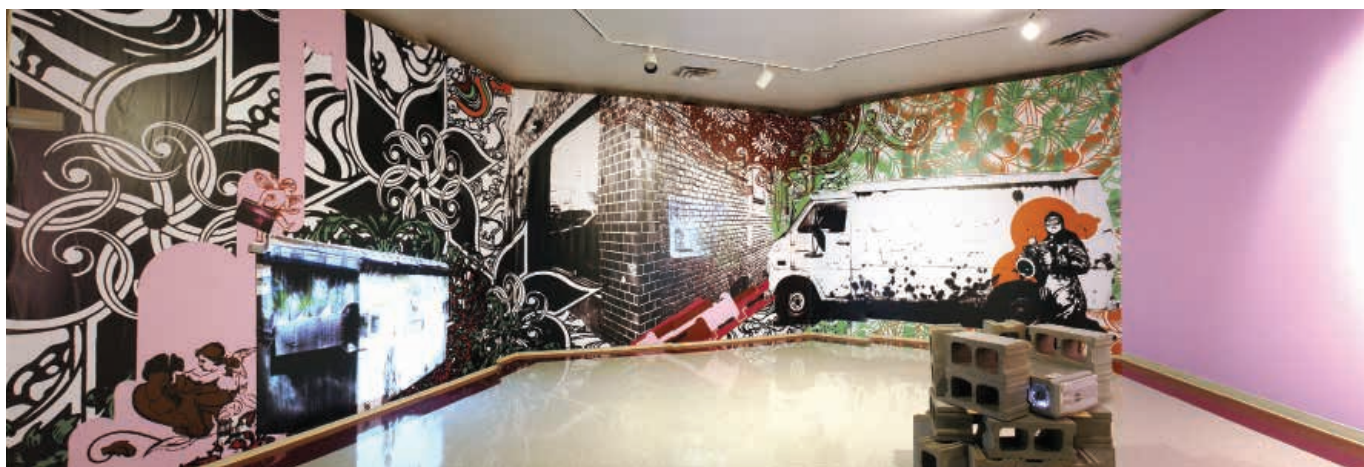


# Phillip Faulkner

Michigan Art Professor Bridges the Digital and Tangible in His Art, Teaching Curriculum



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BY JENNY ANDREASSON

Artist and professor Phillip Faulkner walks down a narrow hallway to his slice of studio space, tucked around the corner from his students' 8-foot-by-10-foot spaces. It's Friday, the day of the week when both students and professors at Finlandia University's International School of Art & Design spend the day working on artwork, employing newly minted skills from that week's class sessions. Two unfinished paintings hang on the wall behind Faulkner as he takes a seat at the table with his laptop. "They're really raw right now," he says of the artwork.

He spends Mondays through Thursdays teaching, but Fridays are his time to focus on his own art. Well, *mostly* his time. He says he's still getting used to his students popping their heads in to ask him about a technique or watch him work.

"The studio process usually goes on behind the scenes. ... I'm kind of exposed right now," he said. "What's helped me get over the discomfort of it is that it's just a tool," another way to help his students forge ahead in the art world.

Faulkner is relatively new around here. He accepted the full-time position as assistant professor of intermedia last summer and had 30 days to move from Denver, the 23rd most populous U.S. city, to Hancock, the northernmost city in Michigan, population 4,600.

"And people think teaching is a boring gig," he said with a laugh about his high-speed relocation along with his wife and 18-month-old son to a city in the upper peninsula of a state he'd never before visited. He's closer to the Great White North than he is to Chicago.

He admits it was a "big jump," both literally and figuratively, from his adjunct work at various Denver colleges. But it was an opportunity he couldn't pass up: He has the reins of Finlandia University's Studio Arts area of study and is working to broaden the scope of the BFA

1 An attempt to overwhelm, 2005, by Phillip Faulkner. Digital collage printed on vinyl, projectors, looping video, 45' x 12'. Copyright © 2005 Phillip Faulkner. 2 American still life #1, 2008, by Phillip Faulkner. Mixed media on wood, LCD panel, looping video. 72" x 48". Copyright © 2008 Phillip Faulkner. Used by permission of the artist.

curriculum to “solidify ‘digital’ as another amenity in an artist’s tool kit.”

### DIGITAL VS. TANGIBLE

Intermedia — a term used to describe the often confusing, interdisciplinary activities that occur between genres — is intimately familiar to Faulkner. He earned his undergraduate degree in digital media at the University of Nebraska and then did his master’s degree in electronic media arts and design at the University of Denver, all the while making traditional artwork.

“I always had a foot in both of those arenas as far as digital and tangible goes. ... I was really interested in the divide between those in computer labs and painting studios — it really bothered me,” he said.

He doesn’t have a style so to speak. He uses a blend of mediums and elements tied together by a common theme: the influence of technology on traditional art.

He demonstrates this using collage: He finds images with Americana flavor in old books and magazines he picks up at garage sales and thrift stores, or through image searches online. He’ll scan the images (particularly if he’s going to create a video) or he’ll tear them directly out of the books to incorporate them into a painting.

When he first started creating videos, they were “paintings in motion.” He did a project where he recorded himself painting on a surface for nine hours. He then buffed the painting white, compressed the video to nine minutes and projected it on the now-white surface.

He uses consumer-level cell phones and point-and-shoot cameras that capture HD video. “I got caught up in the idea that I needed high-end equipment, but using it didn’t do my work any favors,” he said. He’ll draw on a



<sup>3</sup> *Light vision*, 2010, by Phillip Faulkner. Mixed media on canvas, 50” x 40”.  
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tablet to add elements to a video and also use Adobe Creative Suite.

### IT’S A BUSINESS

In the early days of his art career, he didn’t pay much mind to what kind of art people wanted to see or buy. He’d make big artworks, often complicated by attached screens, DVD players and cords.

Now he maintains a balance.

“As I’ve evolved as a maker, I’m thinking about how audiences receive and enjoy work, and ultimately live with it. Some works will never sell, and there are some works that I do expect to sell,” he said.

He’ll keep doing big pieces but also include more economical artwork, such as 11-inch-by-14-inch collages on paper. But he won’t compromise his artistic integrity. “I love to sell the shit out of stuff, but I’m not going to make work I don’t like either,” he said.

Faulkner isn’t promoting his art on Facebook or Twitter. He dismisses those networks as “the world of likes and reposts.” He’s into building more meaningful relationships with admirers, and for that, he turns to Tumblr, Wordpress and of course, his own website, [www.phillipfaulkner.com](http://www.phillipfaulkner.com).

### A GREATER REACH

He didn’t always see himself becoming a professor. When he was an undergraduate student, he thought he’d start his own company. But when he looked at his long-term goals, he changed his mind. “I wanted to create work in a controlled setting and gain accolades, so becoming a professor became a priority,” he said.

The combination of skills was a natural one: He was raised by a teacher mother and a would-be illustrator father.

He’s proud that in his new role, he’s able to both develop as an artist and contribute to the art careers of his students.

“I’m having an impact beyond me,” he said.

Visit [www.phillipfaulkner.com](http://www.phillipfaulkner.com) and [phillipfaulkner.tumblr.com](http://phillipfaulkner.tumblr.com) for more on Phillip Faulkner’s artwork. For more on Finlandia University’s International School of Art & Design in Hancock, Mich., visit [www.finlandia.edu](http://www.finlandia.edu). **PA**

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