

What is that?

It's a balloon.

Are you certain?

Yes. I've seen balloons before and this looks like a balloon. Not only that, but the title declares it's a balloon.

But that's only a title. Titles don't necessarily tell you what the titled thing is.

We might bat it around and see if it behaves like a balloon.

Or shoot darts at it and see if it pops.

Look here, the checklist: it indicates that the balloon is made of Styrofoam and paint. No balloon I've ever encountered was made of such stuff.

So, evidently it's not a balloon. What, then, is it?

Considering we're in an art gallery, it seems safe to say it's a sculpture.

A sculpture pretending to be a balloon?

Ha, that's funny.

Why is that funny?

Because a sculpture is not a sort of thing that can pretend.

But this one deceived us. We thought it was a balloon.

Perhaps the deception isn't in the thing but in your mind.

My mind deceived me?

The "Purple Balloon" just is what it is.

But illusions can have real consequences. A Zen story:

Master is sitting outside steps of temple smoking his pipe and watching his number one pupil meditating in the courtyard. Suddenly the pupil opens his eyes and exclaims, "Master, Master, I have it, I have it! I know the answer to everything!"

"You do?" Asked Master, "and what is it?"

"Everything is just an illusion Master, all is just illusion!"

Master gets up and approaches the student while pulling hard in his pipe, and as he passes the student, turns the contents of his red-hot pipe out on top of the nice bald head and bangs the pipe down hard to empty it, showering student's head with burning embers.

The student jumps up, shouting, "Master, what are you trying to do? I'm burning all over! Are you trying to kill me? What's the matter with you??"

“Ahhhh...,” replies the master, “Illusion makes you very angry.”



Tom Friedman, “Purple Balloon” (2014) paint and Styrofoam, 1 ½” x 50 ½”