

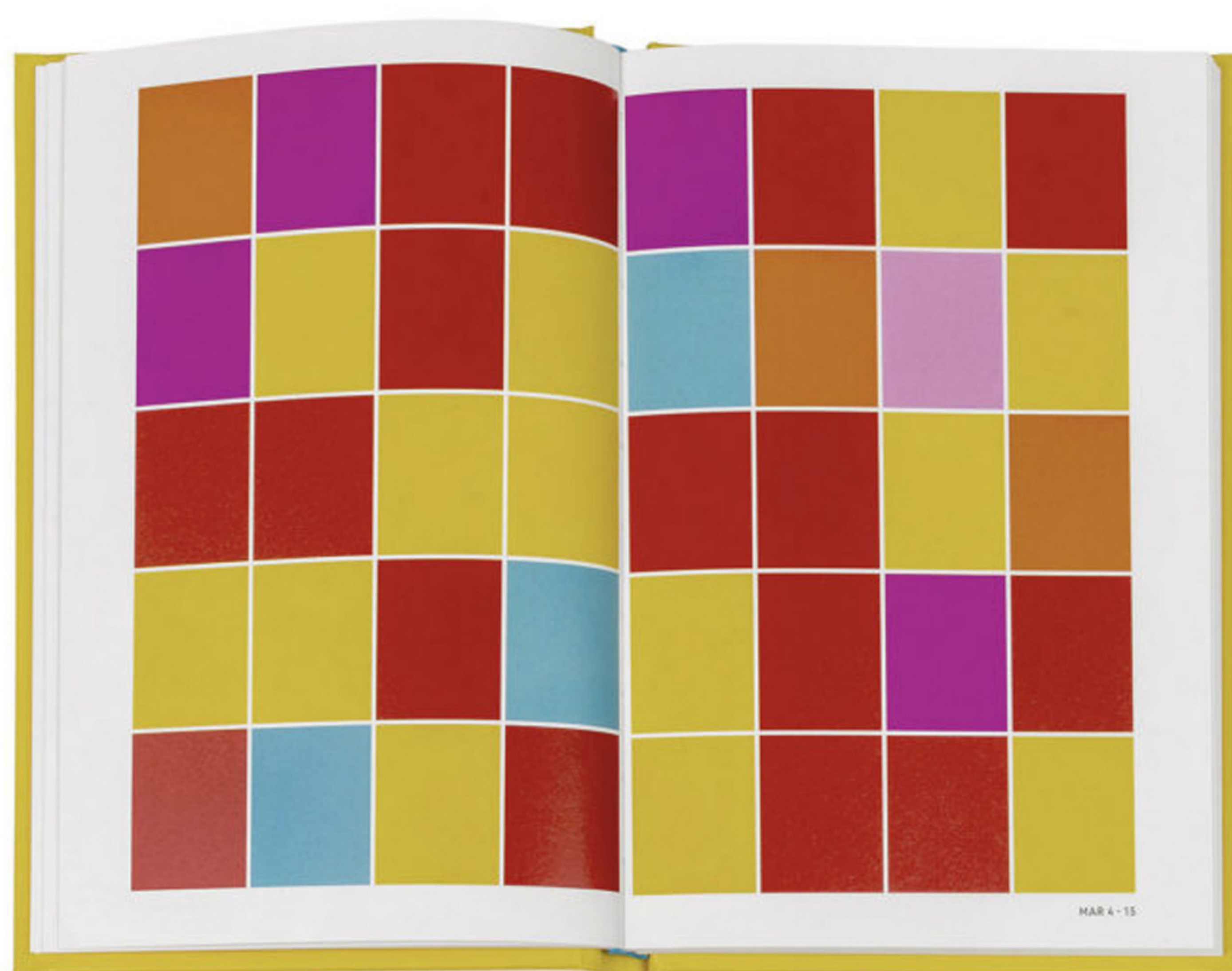
Book Club

Reviews and recommendations from critic Ron Charles.



By **Ron Charles**

✉ Email



Excerpt from "It Is What It Is: All the Cards Issued to Donald Trump, January 2017-January 2021," by Richard Kraft (Siglio, 2021)

How will you observe Guy Fawkes Night? On this day in 1605, barrels of gunpowder were discovered beneath the House of Lords. Conspirators — Guy Fawkes among them — were caught plotting to blow up Parliament and kill King James I.

This is our first Guy Fawkes Day since Jan. 6 when Donald Trump plotted to overturn the presidential election and incited a mob to storm the Capitol chanting, "Hang Mike Pence." Americans might take a moment to consider the way history is written and heroism and villainy are assigned. Four hundred years from now, how will Trump's efforts to blow up our democracy be remembered?

The Post recently published a massive study of what happened before, during and after that deadly attack ([start here](#)). But Trump and his allies have spent the last year working equally hard to distort, minimize and erase the historical record. Trump is suing the National Archives to keep Congress from investigating his actions. Rep. Andrew Clyde (R-Ga.) said TV footage of the rioters looked like "a normal tourist visit" ([gobsmacking](#)). And these concerted acts of revisionism are paying off: At least seven Jan. 6 "tourists" won elections on Tuesday ([yes, for real](#)).

One of the strangest efforts to document Trump's reign comes from a British born artist named Richard Kraft, who received a Guggenheim fellowship earlier this year. The day Trump was inaugurated, Kraft started pretending he was the referee of a political soccer match: Every time Trump committed a foul, Kraft issued him a colored penalty card and wrote a brief description.

Now Kraft has published those penalty cards — some 10,000 of them — in five volumes called "It Is What It Is," released in a boxed set by Siglio Press ([details](#)). An appendix in each volume briefly describes the day's actions or merely quotes what Trump said. All of this is already well-documented by multiple journalists, of course, but there's something weirdly haunting about Kraft's record with its manic determination and regularity. Flipping through these thousands of colored cards, like an elemental cartoon, is both baffling and horrific.

"From about any vantage point, this piece is an exercise in futility," Kraft said about his project, "and that futility made the effort all the more worthwhile. . . . Whenever I wanted a day of respite, I fortified my resolve not to succumb, not to allow the unabating pace of Trump's lies, attacks, ineptitudes, errors of judgement, craven self-dealing — in short, the grotesque nature of his presidency — to wear me down. My belief in the transformative, alchemical power of art served as a survival mechanism." Happy Guy Fawkes Day.