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Arts & Extras: Flying 'Farther' at the Taubman

By MIKE ALLEN on JUNE 29th, 2017



New York artist Paul Villinski's new exhibition at the Taubman Museum of Art, "Farther," had to change quite a bit at the last minute.

Two of the works intended for "Farther" were inside a rental truck stolen from outside Villinski's studio last month. A third work meant for "Farther," called "Passage," was moved to the museum's atrium to replace "Flower Bomber," another piece among the missing that he made especially for the space.

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Luckily, the stolen truck turned up, with all of Villinski's art intact. But rather than add the missing pieces back in, the artist and the museum agreed to keep the show's new configuration as is — which still leaves a lot to see.

"We had too much work planned for the gallery," the artist said. "I'm very pleased with the way it looks."

Villinski, 57, works with discarded and recycled materials, and much of his work incorporates metaphors for flight. His 2013 work "Burst" turns vinyl records into birds. Several of his works feature butterflies made out of aluminum cans. In "Wishful Thinking," a humorous work from 1998, a pair of boots mounted on huge steel springs, something a cartoon character might wear, seems to hang suspended mid-bounce.

The show is essentially a mid-career retrospective. "It's actually capturing 25 years of work," Villinski said. "It's immensely gratifying to me to have the museum gather this work."

A couple of the pieces made specifically for the Taubman show explore darker themes.

"Aerialist" is a 10-foot-wide pair of wings in which every feather is a knife blade. Villinski explained that for him the sculpture, which contains 300 knives, symbolizes humankind's attempts to get airborne and the perilous risks those efforts entailed.

Next to it hangs "Quilt," a tapestry made out of belts, liquor bottles and children's books. A child-sized chair is tucked away in a hidey hole behind the quilt. Taken together, the objects suggest memories of an abusive childhood. "It's very difficult subject matter that at the age of 57 I'm finally willing to tackle head on," he said.

He considers "Quilt" a companion piece to "Comforter," a blanket made from gloves that he made in 1994. The stitched-together gloves represent "hands coming together into a community," he said. "This is very much about hands coming together to provide comfort." Though "Comforter" was made first, he considers it the response to "Quilt."

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The public will have an opportunity to contribute to Villinski's show. From Aug. 17 to Aug. 20, Villinski will offer a series of one-hour workshops. Attendees will be encouraged to bring waste-paper objects such as cardboard boxes, paperback books or junk mail to transform into sculpted paper birds and be added to "Castaways," one of the exhibits in "Farther." Examples of the birds are already hanging in the show.

The workshops will cost \$20 per session, \$18 for museum members. Preregistration is required. People who want to keep their birds can take them home after the show closes Jan. 21.

"Passage" will also remain on display in the atrium until Jan. 21, after which it will be replaced by "Flower Bomber."

Art on Facebook

The artwork that hung in the Taubman's atrium prior to the installation of "Passage" has found a prestigious new home.

"Not Fade Away" by Oklahoma-based artist Rachel Hayes hung in the museum's atrium from September 2015 through the end of May. Then, it went to its new home at the headquarters of social media giant Facebook at 1 Hacker Way, Menlo Park, California.

Commissioned by the Taubman's deputy director of exhibitions and collections, Amy Moorefield, "Not Fade Way" is a series of large sheets made from sewn-together strips of translucent light gel that bathed the atrium in kaleidoscope colors as the sun shone through it. The sheets are hung in a different arrangement at Facebook HQ.

The curator of Facebook's art collection saw photos of the piece hanging in the Taubman and reached out to Hayes about acquiring it, Moorefield said. "I'm delighted for her. It's just so wonderful that piece has a new life and a whole new audience."