

# Art & Design

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Tasset, Paul, 2006.

## Corn and Bunyan

We visit Manilow Sculpture Park and other art spaces off the urban path.

By Lauren Weinberg

Feeling like a bit player in a *Children of the Corn* sequel, we hurry down Governors State University's deserted Alumni Way. It's Saturday afternoon and an eerie hush lies over GSU, which is home to the free **Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park** (One University Pkwy, University Park; 708-534-4486; [www.gost.edu/sculpture](http://www.gost.edu/sculpture); Metra: Elec Main to University Park). We relax once we reach the main university buildings and see a few students, who don't look as if they're planning to use us in a ritual sacrifice. Still, you might want to visit the park during the week or with a friend: It's open from dawn to dusk 365 days a year.

Wear comfy shoes and plan to spend about two hours wandering among the park's 26 contemporary sculptures, scattered throughout GSU's 750-acre campus. Picnic spots range from vast expanses of grass to umbrella-shaded tables overlooking Museum Lake.

Many distinguished artists have left their mark on the park since its founding 30 years ago, most recently

Tony Tasset, whose 30-foot-tall sculpture of American folk hero Paul Bunyan (pictured)—portrayed as a weary, worn-out old man—was installed in 2006. One of the most effective pieces is Bruce Nauman's concrete *House Divided* (1983), a shedlike structure that sits at the end of an overgrown path, waiting to terrify fearful urbanites—we mean, to discomfort visitors with its odd division of internal space and views of the empty prairie. Martin Puryear's and Mary Miss's land art can only be fully appreciated from the air, but Miss's *Field Rotation* (1982) strikes us as the perfect place to cut class: The center of the four-acre piece is a sunken gravel garden accessible solely by ladders.

Most of the park's sculptures are metal or concrete abstractions, including the first work to be completed on the site, Mark di Suvero's *Yes! For Lady Day* (1968–69), as well as pieces by John Henry, Richard Hunt and other local artists known for similar outdoor commissions in Chicago.

Viewing their work in the middle of our busy city can't compare to experiencing it in the Manilow Sculpture Park's serene setting, and while Chicago's public art tends to be upbeat by decree, we're pleasantly surprised by

how dark and politically charged GSU's collection can be. Christine Tarkowski's *Working on the Failed Utopia* (2005) is downright depressing: Screen-printed panels cover a geodesic dome with images of chicken bones, Modelo cans and other trash the artist found near her studio. In GSU's helpful annotated map of the park (available on its website), Tasset describes *Paul* as "an allegory of American optimism, power and consequence." Would Mayor Daley ever green-light a public sculpture that conveys humility and introspection?

## Bruce Nauman's House Divided is waiting to terrify fearful urbanites.

Many other art spaces are ideal for day trips from Chicago. The **Elmhurst Art Museum** (150 Cottage Hill Ave, Elmhurst; 630-834-0202; [elmhurstartmuseum.org](http://elmhurstartmuseum.org); Metra: Union Pacific W to Elmhurst; \$4), which incorporates the Ludwig Mies van der Rohe–designed McCormick House, supports community artists while exhibiting nationally known ones such as Chakaia Booker and Marc Sijan. The museum currently shows work by Sijan—whose ultrarealistic sculptures of human figures we find a little cheesy, sadly—and locals Stacza Lipinski and Tony Tesaro.

The **Gahlberg Gallery** (McAninch Arts Center, College of DuPage, 425 Fawcett Blvd, Glen Ellyn; 630-942-2321; [cod.edu/gallery](http://cod.edu/gallery); Metra: Union Pacific to College Ave, then Pace Bus 715) hosts shows by respected locals like Richard Rezac, Mark Booth and Industry of the Ordinary. The free gallery's current exhibition of UIC prof Dianna Frid's work runs through August 8.

**Orleans Street Gallery** (4051 E Main St, St. Charles; 630-524-5048; [orleansstreetgallery.com](http://orleansstreetgallery.com)) transcends its unlikely home—Pheasant Run Resort—with consistently challenging shows of Chicago artists we like, organized by Anni Holm and Irene Perez, who are artists themselves.

We've always admired **Refuge** (4811 Main St, Skokie; 847-673-3737; [refuge.com](http://refuge.com); El: Yellow to Skokie, Bus: 54A) for its unique mission: promoting work by professional artists who've overcome addiction and other challenges. That commitment results in distinctive shows.

For more photos of Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park, visit [timeoutchicago.com/art](http://timeoutchicago.com/art).

## Review

### "From a Position"

★★★★★

**Evanston Art Center**, through Jun 28 (see Museums & Institutions).

Jeff Carter's *Catalog (Floor)* (2008, pictured) transforms mundane IKEA wood flooring into an elegant landscape of hills and canyons perfect for a six-inch-tall skateboarder. Art's ability to create just such a "micro-environment" is a key theme of "From a Position," which also considers how art refers to its social and historical contexts.

Yet some works by the show's 14 artists hardly engage these concerns, leading us to wonder why they're there. Scottish-born artist Lucy McKenzie's naturalistic, colored-pencil portrait *Tin Tin 4* (2005) is a great fit: Tintin, the 20th-century Belgian comic-strip hero, seems like a handsome, privileged preppe in his signature sweater and plus fours once McKenzie fleshes out the simplified features he was given by creator Hergé. Her intriguing piece offers additional meaning to viewers familiar with criticisms of the comic's supposedly racist or colonialist content. But McKenzie's *Frankie* (2005), a pencil drawing of a nude woman, just comes off as awkward and anchorless.

Curator Maxwell G. Graham includes several respected artists, not all of whom present their best work. The four photos in Barbara Crane's *Coloma to Covert Sticks* (1994, pictured) succeed, however, as both formal studies and homages to the natural world. In *Vinyl III* (2000), which he filmed at the Getty, Stephen Prina references Andy Warhol and 17th-century European painting—while making us consider how artists create self-contained worlds in their work and what distinguishes a museum atmosphere. The film's loud, discordant score, composed by Prina himself, generates its own micro-environment. Though almost intolerable, it's an appropriate soundtrack for an imperfect but intelligent show.—LW



"From a Position" installation view, 2009.