

# Artist Paula Crown's Outdoor Installation *Transposition* Ends After a Year in the Design District

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A midlife career shift can prove daunting to most people. Yet for Chicago-based artist Paula Crown, the move from Wall Street tycoon to art-world denizen was a snap. After serving as VP of finance for Salomon Brothers and transferring to a smaller firm in Chicago, Crown decided to indulge in her lifelong creative aspirations. In the past several years, she has become one of the most sought-after contemporary artists working in new and emerging mediums such as 3D printing and virtual mapping.

In late 2014, she partnered with the Design District to install a piece in a vacant lot on the corner of NE First Avenue and 39th Street. *Transposition: Over Many Miles* was meant as a fully interactive yearlong piece, and it slowly grew and evolved with the local landscape. On the eve of the piece's anniversary, *New Times* spoke with the artist to discuss the intricate details of the project.

***New Times:* You started your career in art later in life. What was the motivation behind the change?**

*Paula Crown:* I have always considered myself to be an artist. I have been making art since I was a small child... I learned to paint in an adult studio when I was 8 years old. Although my parents did not know much about art, they knew the walls in our home would be preserved if I learned to paint properly on canvas.

During my school years and through college graduation, I continued to pursue courses that developed tools for my artistic quiver... While raising my children, I worked on projects in design, real-estate development, and philanthropy, stretching from New York to LA... I craved the creative process, and knew I needed to practice on a full-time basis. For me, art has the capacity to express thoughts where words or actions fall short. Without art, I realized that I was missing an important part of my expressive possibilities.

**How did *Transposition* come about? Did you develop the project in collaboration with the Design District?**

[Design District developer] Craig Robins was considering a temporary sculpture for a future building site located between 39th and 40th on NE First avenue. He initially was considering a project for Art Basel 2014.

[Chicago-based artist] Theaster Gates and I had been discussing the possibility of making some of my work in reclaimed materials... I love the gesture of returning dignity to abandoned materials. It provides opportunities to rediscover the history of objects. *Transposition* reflects an archaeology of human mark making. I had conceived of a large perforation sculpture, not an entire block. I did some improvised sketches on the survey plan right up until the plane landed before my first meeting with Craig in Miami. The plan "transposed" successfully from an aerial drawing of the Drakensberg Mountains to a 3,500-square-foot immersive sculpture in the Design District.

**Can you describe the evolution of the piece and its various incarnations throughout the year?**

The work has developed a lovely dialogue with the viewers. I wanted *Transposition* to be organic. The weather affected the surface, and some original paint was baked away. Rains soaked the wood, and it became fertile space for varieties of mushrooms and moss. (We did have to take safe steps to inhibit further growth, lest the wood would lose its integrity.) Throughout the last 18 months, it has served as a perfect platform for professional and amateur artists, yogis, musicians, and dancers. It provides space and greenery, which is sparse in urban areas.

Last year on the summer solstice, we surprised the neighborhood with hundreds of multicolored balls. The dual message was "It is summer; have a ball and take one too." In autumn, we decided to transpose thousands of real oak leaves... to a place where there were no trees. Viewers would pause and ask, 'Where are the leaves coming from?' I wanted to share the experience of playing in the leaves – without the chore of raking them!

For Art Basel 2015, I worked with Ted Lawson from New York to make three-dimensional sculptures on selected places. These fiberglass forms, lit from within, seemed to float. Poetically, they reference the original mountain drawings.

### **What has the reaction been like from the public?**

That is best answered by asking members of the public. My observations lead me to believe that viewers are curious. The work makes them pause, open their car windows, come closer, and experience the multiple levels of the work. It happens in a beautiful and pure way. If I can provide people moments of repose and engagement in their busy days, then the project is a success. The added joy has been to see *Transposition* being used as a platform for other creative endeavors, including the Alma Dance Company, New World Symphony, Dash, and adorable toddlers armed with Crayola chalk.

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