

A Panorama of Design

Exhibitions, products and personalities.

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Sculptures by a Small But Determined Artist



Joseph Havel's "Broke Palace 1" (2022), cardboard and polyurethane resin, part of "Parrot Architecture," an exhibition at Dallas Contemporary. The sculptor's pet was his collaborator. Joseph Havel

By Matt Shaw

Hannah, an African gray parrot, is an exceptional talent.

Five years ago, when she [chewed a piece of balsa wood](#) into something resembling a small Giacometti, her owner, Joseph Havel, an artist based in Houston, had a realization: "Wow, I have a bird that is a sculptor!"

It was the start of a collaboration between man and pet that evolved into "[Joseph Havel: Parrot Architecture](#)," an exhibition of sculptures and wall assemblages at Dallas Contemporary.

The partnership has been a boon during the pandemic. Parrots are social creatures that live in colonies, and Hannah is a natural nest-builder, Mr. Havel said. She works by gnawing and pecking at pieces of balsa wood and cardboard boxes, which the artist casts in bronze or coats in resin for durability. The works have sold for \$35,000 to \$120,000.

"Many of our dilemmas in this human-centric world are from not having an empathetic relationship with other species," he said. "She has a culture, and I have a culture, and we have found common ground."

Mr. Havel said he found himself "translating between the bird and foundry" and avoided putting too much of himself into the pieces. "Birdhouse 1" is a bronze cast of a pedestal of chewed balsa wood that Mr. Havel merely topped with two chewed shoeboxes. He took more liberty with "Broke Palace 1," a composition of online-shopping boxes sculpted by Hannah that comments on the pandemic's torrent of wasteful packaging. Through Aug. 21; dallascontemporary.org