Robert C. Tannen | BOX-CITY

Exhibition Dates: February 7, 2020 – May 16, 2020
Reception Date: Friday, February 7, 2020

The Hilliard University Art Museum is pleased to announce the solo exhibition of Robert C. Tannen.

Robert C. Tannen is a self-described artist and regional planner. After earning a Master of Fine Arts from the Pratt Institute in 1963 he leveraged his knowledge of industrial design, fine art, and architecture to great effect as an important cultural figure, he worked with the RAND corporation in New York City.
Before relocating to the Gulf Coast in 1969 to assist in recovery and redevelopment efforts after Hurricane Camille, he worked with Meta Systems, Inc. on water resource planning projects. He was also notably on the planning team for the Frank Gehry Ecological Museum in Panama City, Panama and the Ohr-O’Keefe Museum of Art in Biloxi, Mississippi, completed in 2012. Among his many art related achievements are co-founding the Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans in 1976 and exhibitions of his work at the New Orleans Museum of Art, Contemporary Art Center, Ogden Museum of Southern Art, Arthur Roger Gallery, P.S. 1 in Long Island City, Santa Monica Museum of Art, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, and Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston among others.

As the images accompanying these words attest, the concept of home permeates most of Tannen’s work. He posits home as a literal and figurative shelter where people develop a sense of self, community, and purpose, but he is deeply troubled by how unsustainable society’s current notion of home is. His response is a utopian and experimental one that recognizes the greater efficiency of living in more dense urban configurations. In a future with more people and less to go around, greater efficiency will be important because it will leave more resources to sustain human endeavors and the various natural ecologies upon which we depend. With this in mind, BOX-CITY is a largely interactive exhibition using cardboard boxes as to-scale models that allow museum visitors to explore Tannen’s forward-looking urban design concepts as they relate to collaboration and civic discourse. Moreover, the world wide increase of homelessness is witness to the use of cardboard for temporary housing.

BOX-CITY, the monumental work of art for which the exhibition is titled will consist primarily of sixty 40” x 48” x 40” triple wall boxes visitors can use to create their own three-story metropolis. Each box represents a home unit and their interchangeability allows for a great deal of flexibility, leaving the possibility for individuality to manifest itself in urban planning instead of rigid homogeneity. While standardized, it is comforting that Tannen sees citizens as empowered to impact their environment insofar as it respects the needs of the collective. As a result, BOX-CITY is apt to drastically change aesthetics depending on who is interacting with it; sometimes resembling containers stacked with precision on a cargo ship, other times the chaotic and romanticized sprawl of pre-Haussmann Paris, and still other times a Minecraft-like world that walks the line between organic and geometric.

Cardboard is a versatile, relatable material and Tannen’s BOX-CITY positions it as something rife with metaphor and as a potential building material. If treated with a protective coating, cardboard could be a light-weight and weather-proof alternative to other heavier and less sustainable materials. At once a potential solution to a problem, cardboard is also frequently associated with storm debris. In a world with more frequent and severe storms, Tannen’s use of it at a monumental scale underscores the sheer size and importance of better understanding how our decisions impact mankind’s ability to survive in the future.

Upon request, press and media kits are available that include high resolution images and selected literature on the artist.

Museum Hours, Admission & General Information
The Hilliard University Art Museum is located at 710 East Saint Mary Boulevard, on the campus of University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Museum Hours are: Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM; Wednesday, 9:00 AM to 8:00 PM; Saturday, 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM; closed Sunday and Monday. General Admission: $5 Adults, $4 Seniors (62+), $3 Students (5-17). FREE for Members, UL Students/Staff/Faculty with identification, and visitors under 5. For general information, please visit HilliardMuseum.org or call 337-482-2278.

About the Hilliard Museum
The Hilliard University Art Museum operates on the campus of University of Louisiana at Lafayette, and was originally founded in 1964 as the Art Center for Southwestern Louisiana. Featuring a state-of-the-
art modern facility that was erected in 2004, the museum houses more than 2,200 objects in its permanent collection, and is the largest art exhibition space between New Orleans and Houston. The Hilliard serves a wide range of educational and cultural needs by fostering cross-disciplinary intellectual discourse on campus, and throughout the region. At the core of the Hilliard's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit the art of our time, while celebrating the great diversity of Louisiana's heritage.