

# ***WHAT STARTED AS A JOKE***

A large field of pink flamingo lawn ornaments is planted in a green lawn. In the background, a large, multi-story brick building with a classical facade, featuring a portico with white columns, is visible. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

**MATTHEW MAZZOTTA**

State Street Campus Garage/Hawthorne Court  
Madison, WI

Feb 2026

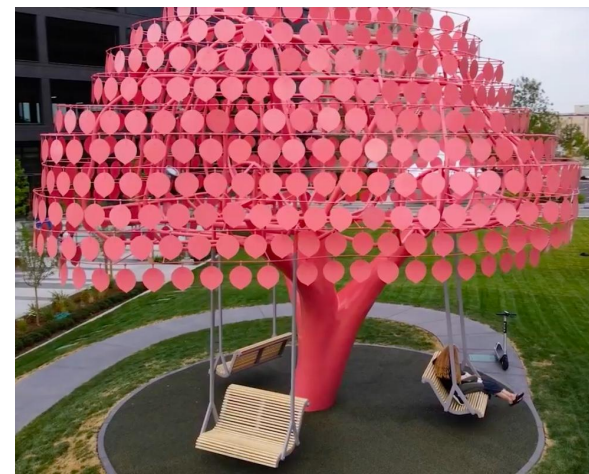
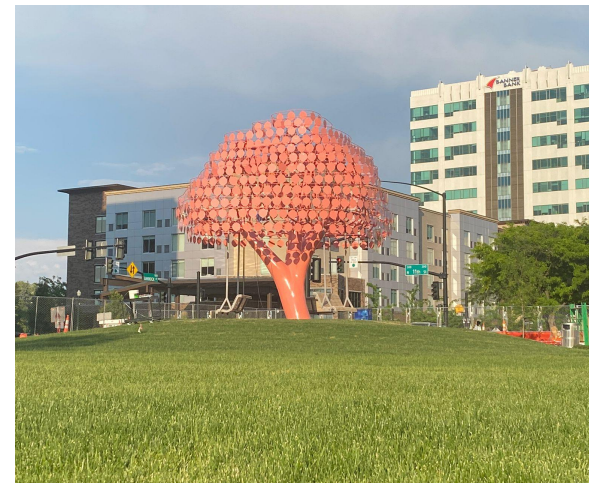


## Previous Work



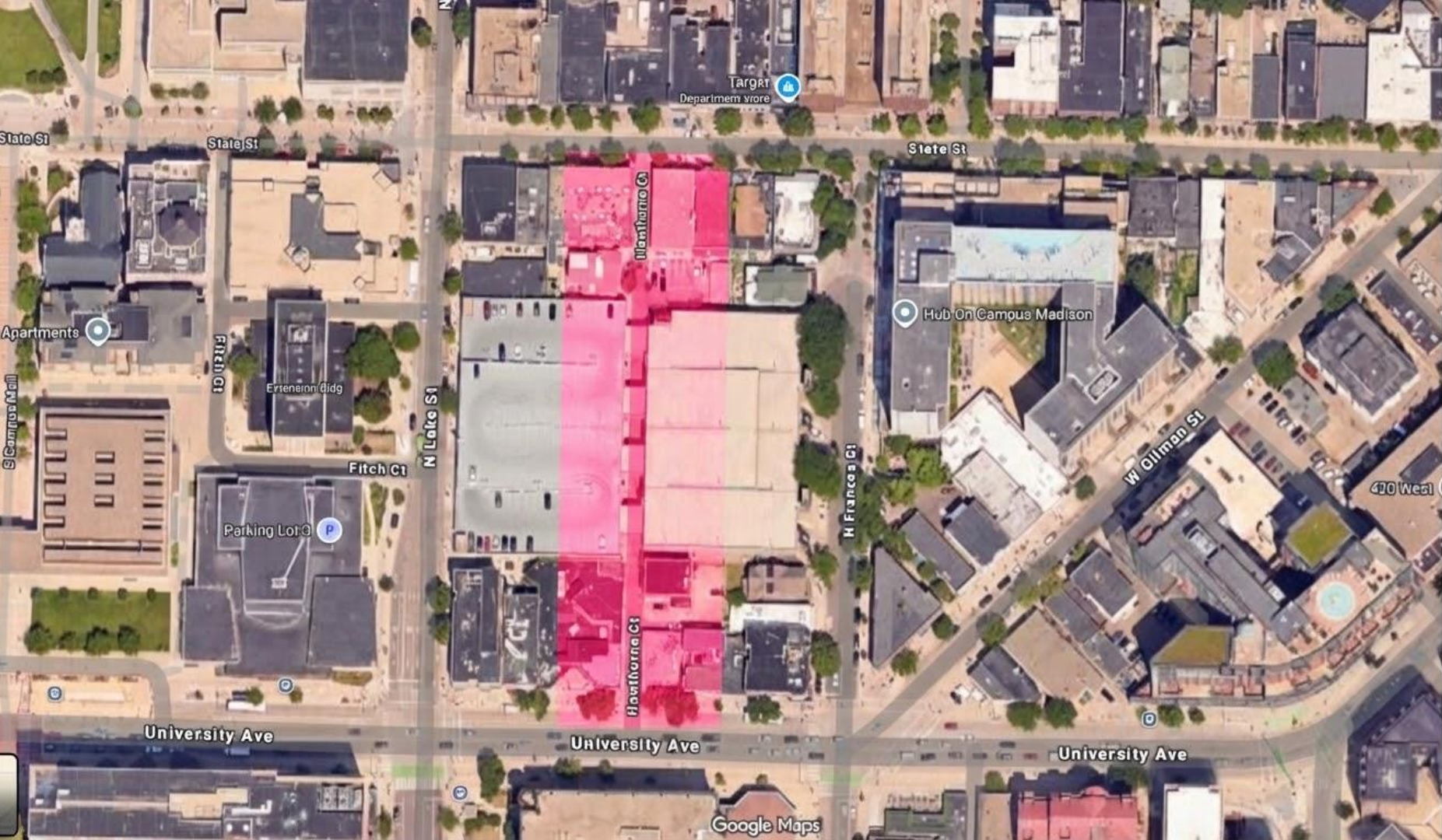


## Previous Work



# ***SITE ANALYSIS***

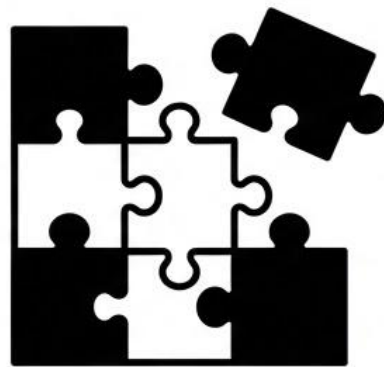
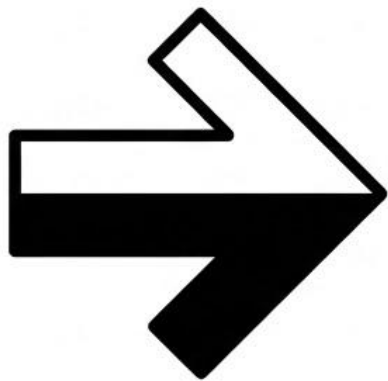




FORWARD

+

UNCONVENTIONAL





## Madison is “Forward”

Madison's identity as a progressive city is deeply rooted in its university culture — UW-Madison has historically been a hub for student activism, most notably during the Vietnam War era when it became one of the most radical protest centers in the country.



1967 Protests

The city's political landscape consistently leans far left even by Wisconsin standards (known for its "flip state status") with a long tradition of progressive local officials dating back to the early 20th century. Madison also tends to be an early adopter of progressive policies

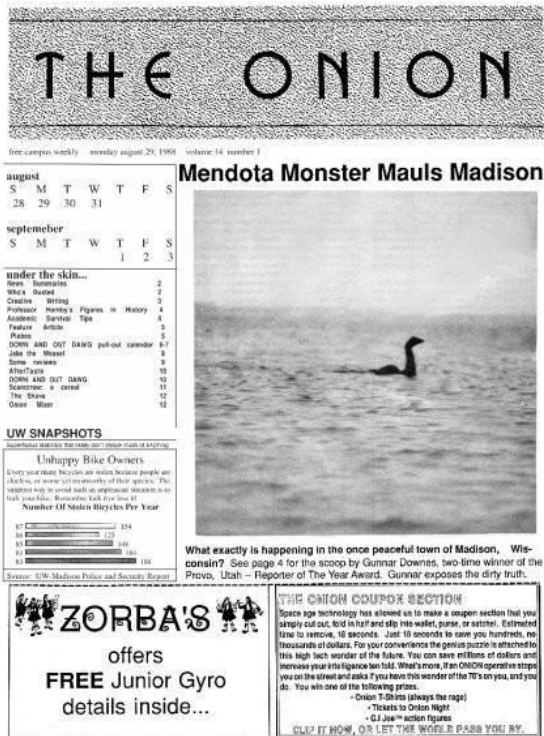


2025 Workers rights  
Protests



# Madison is “Unconventional”

When The Onion launched in Madison in 1988, it reflected something already embedded in the city's character — an urge to challenge, turning sharp local wit into a global media phenomenon.



Original copy of “The Onion”

That restless, energy isn't new; it's apart of the city's DNA, passed down from generations of students and activists who believed things could be done differently here.



The Willy Street Fair in Madison



## Original Pink Flamingos (1957)

- The plastic lawn flamingo was created in 1957 by designer Don Featherstone for Union Products in Leominster, Massachusetts once known as the “Plastics Capital of the World.”
- Featherstone based the form on photographs from *National Geographic* because he had never seen a real flamingo, which explains its stylized posture and signature S-shaped neck.
- The ornament fit perfectly into post-WWII suburban life: cheap injection-molded decor that let homeowners **individualize** nearly identical new lawns.
- By the 1960s–70s it became a symbol of American kitsch — mocked by critics but embraced by working-class families and later reclaimed by artists and camp culture.



Don Featherstone & The original Flamingo design

***WHAT STARTED AS A JOKE***

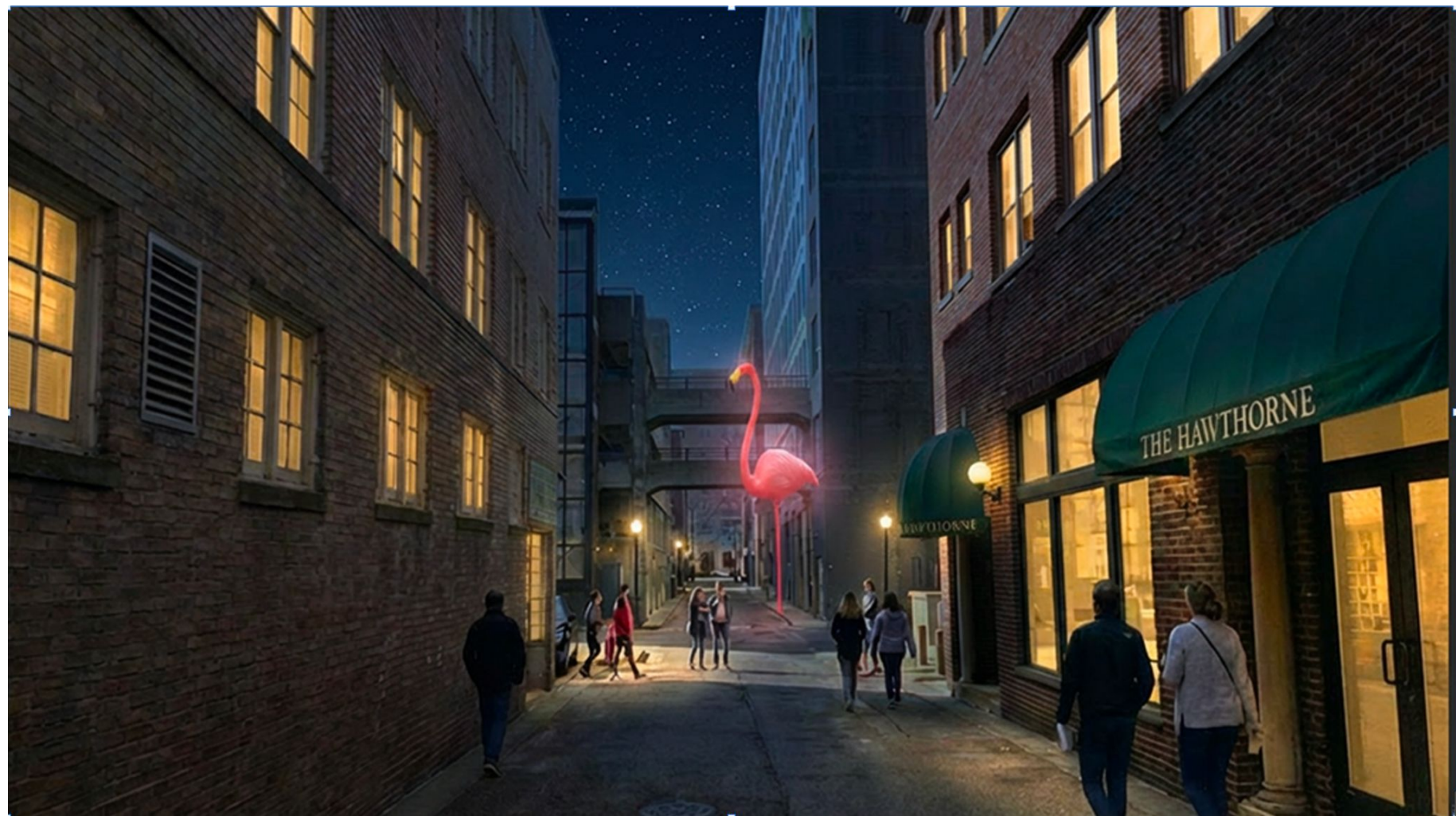


Version 1















# THE FLAMINGO: HAWTHORNE COURT SCULPTURE

**28ft**

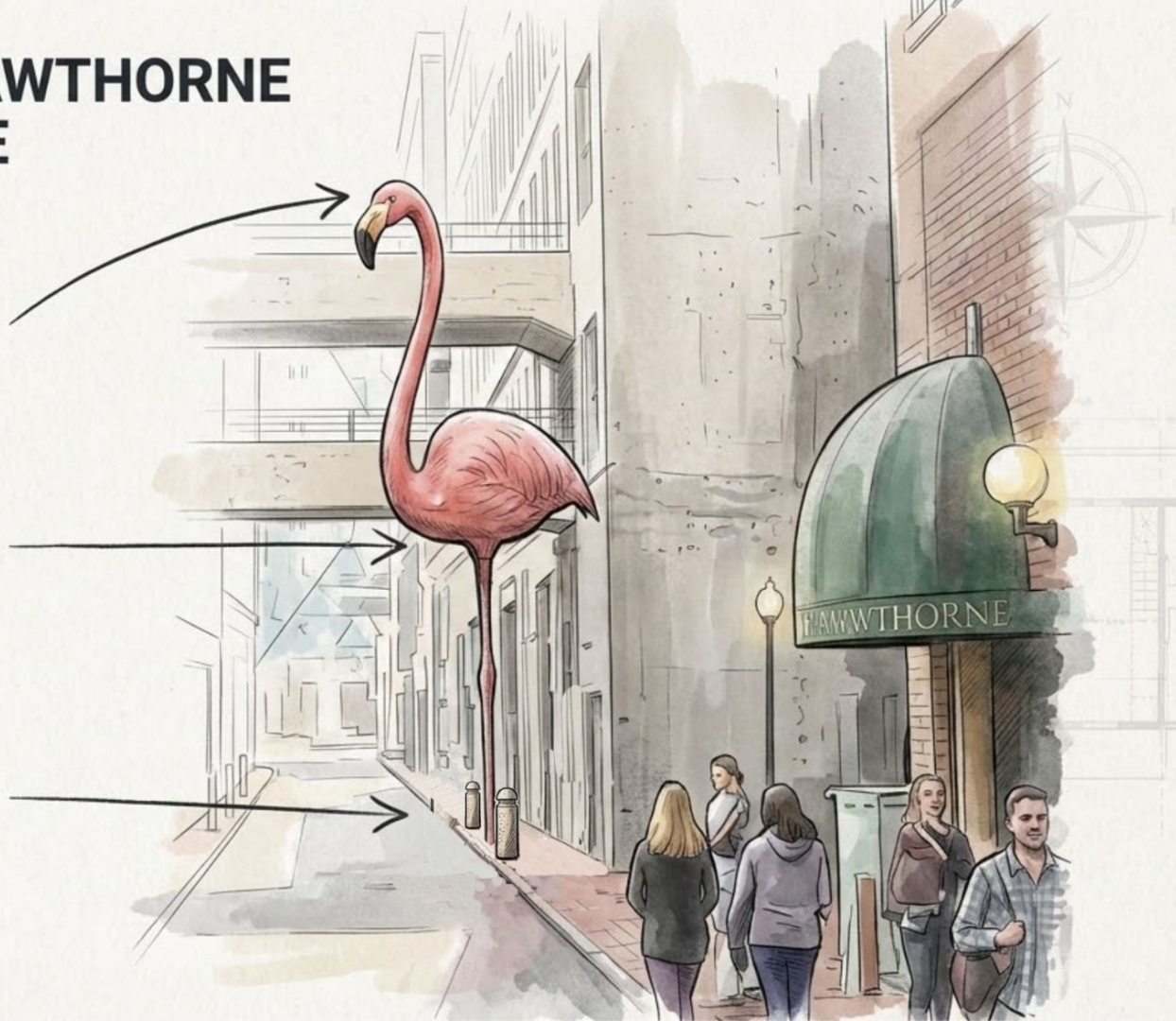
Total Height

**14ft**

Clearance for Bus

**TWO DISCRETE BOLLARDS**

Vehicular Protection



Version 2







On the outside, a huge flamingo statue peers in through the glass — but step inside and look back out, and the flamingo is gone, replaced by an enormous pink smiley face gazing back at you through the window.

(The view on the right is from the second floor of the parking garage, looking out to where the flamingo head would be peering in the building — but instead of the bird, what looks back is an enormous pink smiley face gazing in through the glass.)



## Project Proposal and History

On September 4, 1979, the Pail and Shovel Party — a satirical student government group at UW-Madison led by Jim Mallon and Leon Varjian, known for their “prank” platform — planted 1,008 plastic pink flamingos on Bascom Hill as a prank to welcome returning students. The same group was also behind other legendary stunts, but the flamingo prank was the one that gained national attention and cemented itself as a true Madison legend. Over the decades, the plastic flamingo became a beloved local icon, and in 2009 — on the 30th anniversary of the original prank — the Madison Common Council voted 15-4 to designate the plastic pink flamingo (officially dubbed *Phoenicopterus plasticus*) as the city's official bird. The stunt inspired lasting traditions, including the annual "Fill the Hill" fundraiser that recreates the original flock on Bascom Hill, and its cultural reach extended into sports as well, with Forward Madison FC adopting the flamingo as its logo in 2018, ensuring the bird's legacy lives on well beyond a single college prank.

*WHAT STARTED AS A JOKE* takes this piece of Madison's history and cements it into another hidden alley of the city's collective unconscious. The proposal for this project places an oversized flamingo artwork in an alleyway — a tropical intruder in an urban space, extending Madison's tradition of placing the out-of-place exactly where you wouldn't expect it.

1979, Flamingos on Bascom Hill





## 2024 “Fill the Hill” Fundraiser



## 2024 “Fill the Hill” Fundraiser



## Project Description

*WHAT STARTED AS A JOKE* is a 28 foot oversized pink plastic flamingo embedded in the streets of Madison. Made of painted polyurea and steel, the sculpture is designed to be woven into the alley streetscape without impeding traffic or pedestrian flow, celebrating the city's iconic mascot. Two versions are shown here:

- Version 1— is the flamingo facing the street. It acts as a massive, bold statement in the urban landscape, facing the street and greeting every passerby on State street, creating an unmistakable and slightly surreal neighborhood landmark. The hope is this will be a “secret” of Madison and a place for selfies and to bring family and friends to experience the urban legend.
- Version 2 - is the flamingo with its head facing into the window of parking garage. From the street, the flamingo's head is seen looking into the building, however, once you enter the room on the second floor and look back toward the glass, the bird's form vanishes. In its place, the head of the sculpture reveals an enormous pink smiley face looking back into the building, offering a cheerful surprise for those inside.



# MATERIALS

- Flamingo sculpt: HFP, EPS foam
- Flamingo hard-coat: Polycoat, Polyeuro MH-751FR (this Polyurea/resin hard-coat has an integral fire retardant).
- Flamingo paint finish: Golden Artists paint/Satin Base, custom paint applied as required
- Flamingo clear-coat: PPG Deltron NXT DCU2021(Urethane automotive clear coat)
- Internal structure (armature/plinth): stainless steel or mild steel with a corrosion resistant coating (tbc)
- Foundation/pad-Concrete with steel reinforcing.

## Artwork fabrication methods:

- Steelwork/armatures; cut/weld/dress steel tubes/plates. Coated with a corrosion resistant finish if mild-steel. Integrated into the sculpted figures (see below)
- EPS-foam blocks are 5-axis machine cut to form the sculpt/shape. The foam is hollowed out to accept the metal armature/frame which supports it. The foam parts are then bonded together over the frame, to form the finished shape, with all joints made good.
- A Polyurea hard coat is applied over the foam to create the hard sculpted surface, this is then re-worked by hand to enhance and retain the sculptures surface details.
- A primer then paint coat is then applied to the work
- Finally a clear top coat is applied to protect the paint finish (extends warranty, UV protection)

# MAINTENANCE & DETAILS

Possible contractors providing services:

- Engineering design: Yetiweurks (Nick Geurts) +1 303-646-7553
- Sculpting/Metal Work/Installation/Mechanism: Smash, [www.smashthedesign.com](http://www.smashthedesign.com) +1 956-371-4480

Care & Maintenance recommendations:

- Unless vandalised, it is not anticipated that the structure (foam/hard-coat/paint) will need maintenance over its anticipated lifetime, however the clear top coat should be regularly reapplied (see below). Regular visual inspections of the Artwork should be made to ensure integrity. If vandalised, the figure can be reworked/painted by a suitable professional.
- The finished surface can be occasionally lightly cleaned using a damp (water/mild soap solution/any type of normal car cleaner) lint free/microfiber cloth. When cleaning, light actions only should be used. Treat it like a car when cleaning, but avoid high-pressure washing. See data sheet. DO NOT POWER-WASH THE ARTWORK.

Long term surface treatments:

- The clear coat can have a sealant applied to it once a year to extend its lifespan, using 'Chemical Guys JETSEAL MATTE Sealant' (or similar), please ensure to follow the instructions on the label.
- Every 10 years it is advised to HVLP (High Volume Low Pressure) spray the sculpture with clear coat (PPG Deltron NXT). To be carried out by industry professionals. The clear coat paint is Urethane sign and automotive grade paint (it has a similar lifespan to car paint). This will need to be carried out according to the clear coat manufactures instructions. See data sheet

# INSTALLATION (preliminary)

- Expected duration; 4 days
  - Equipment required; telescopic forklift or mobile-crane, flat-bed truck.
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1. The foundations are in place, embedded anchor bolts/hardware installed and lift position permitted (by others).
  2. The Artwork will have the packaging removed from only the necessary elements, ready for installation.
  3. It is hoped that the Artwork be shipped/installed in one-piece, if possible.
  4. The Artwork is slinged and then lifted from the flat-bed truck, which is parked adjacent to the final Artwork location.
  5. The Artwork is oriented, moved into position above the foundations and lowered onto the anchor bolts
  6. Fine tuning/leveling adjustments are made and the Artwork is secured to the anchor bolts.
  7. At this point any required backfill/pour can be undertaken.
  8. Once safely secured, all packaging can be carefully removed.
  9. The site is then cleaned and returned to its original state



# **SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL:**

**Examples of completed Polyurea artworks**























CONCEPT RENDER



























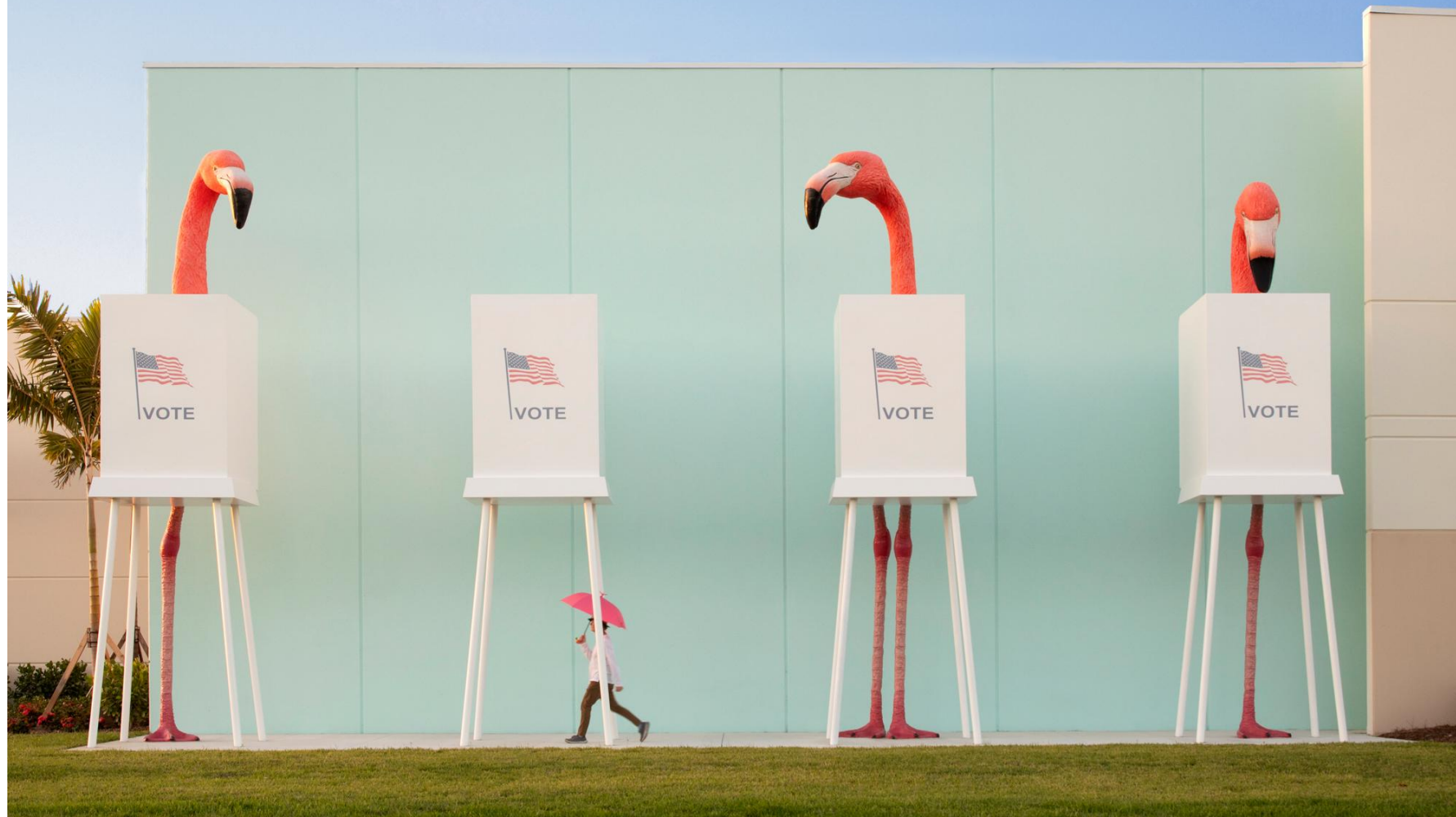




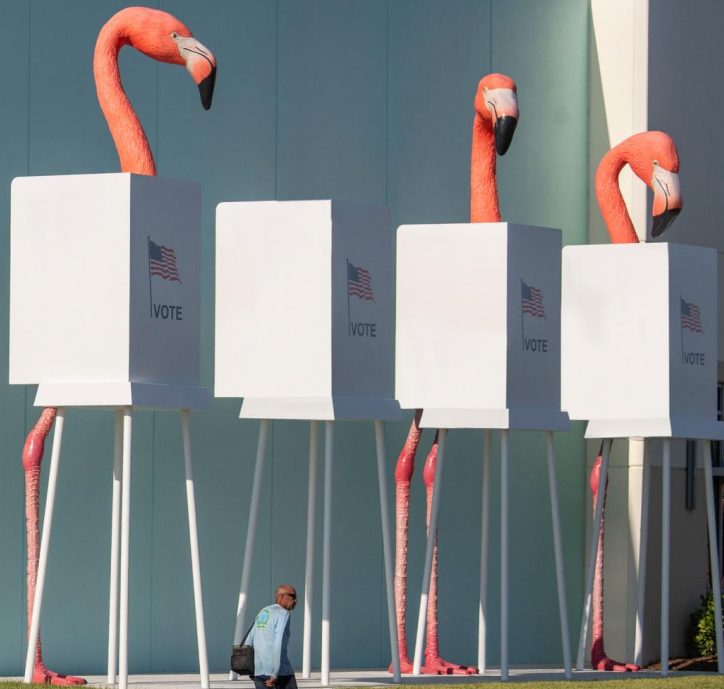


CONCEPT RENDERING



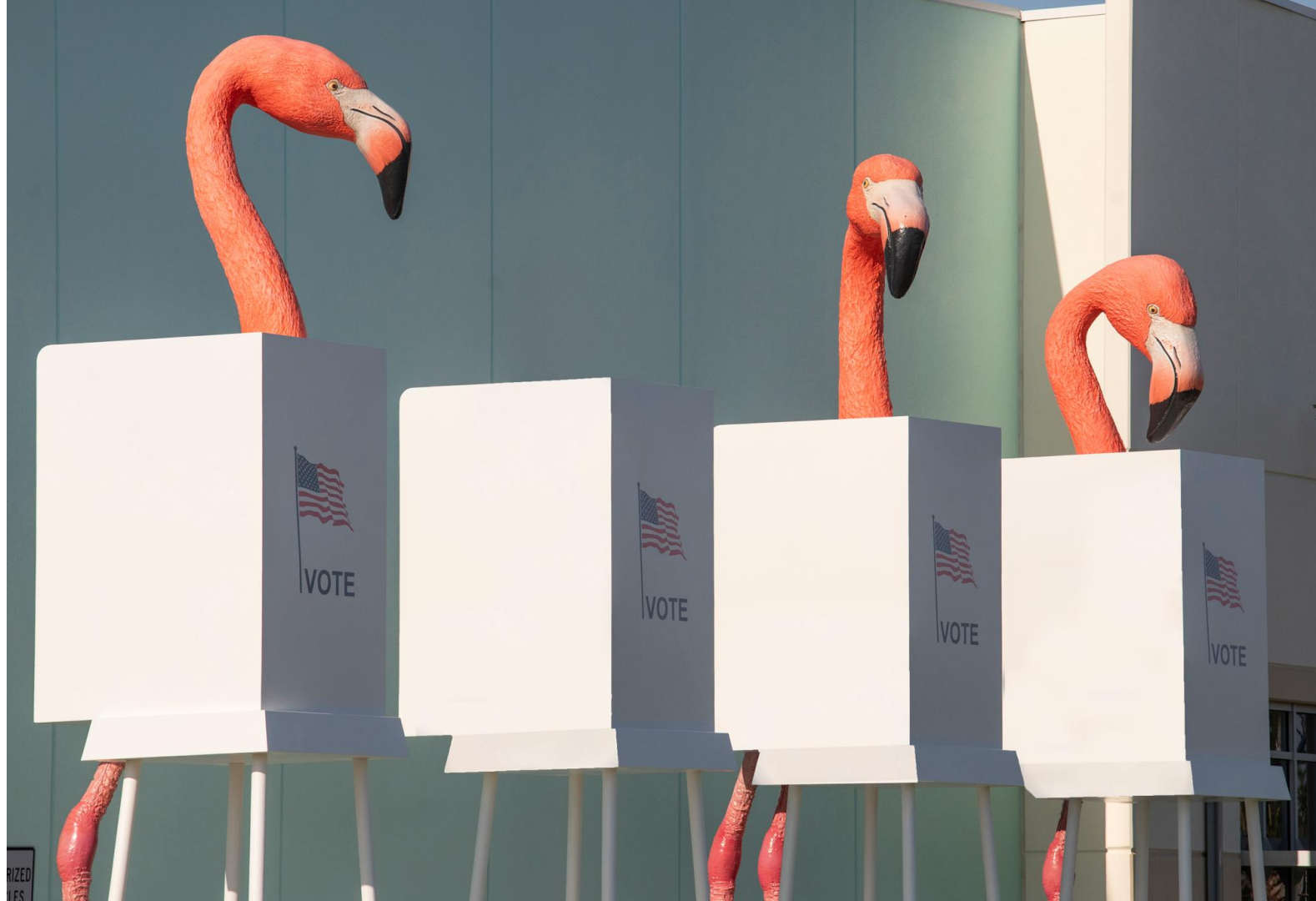


PALM BEACH COUNTY  
SUPERVISOR  
OF ELECTIONS























**THANK YOU**