

# Present / Tense



**Sculpture, Paintings, and Drawings by**  
**Tom and Malayka Gormally**



Tom and Malayka Gormally on their wedding day in Seattle.  
Photo: Bernie O'Brien.

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**Blanden Memorial Art Museum**

**June 22 - September 14, 2019**

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## Artists' Statement

*Present / Tense is both a meditation on our extended family and an exploration of the contemporary challenges of human connection in this cultural moment.*

In the East Gallery, three of Tom's sculptures memorialize the passing of his father, William "Bud" Gormally, a native of Fort Dodge. Bud was a powerful person - the leader of the Gormally family tribe. These sculptures pay homage to his initial anxiety and subsequent acceptance, dignity, and bravery in his final journey. Several of Malayka's paintings focus on Gormally family reunions, particularly the family's front-lawn farewell ritual. The scattered clusters of family members remind the artist of the broader meaning of the family in the historical art canon.

In the 2nd Floor Gallery, Tom's *Fox In The Henhouse* series addresses the ever-increasing divisiveness and level of vitriol in American society; with this series, he aims to inspire dialogue and help bridge the widening gap in our culture. Tom approaches the issue in a way similar to how he imagines a shaman would deal with this disturbance, by creating effigies to dispel the negative influences. He combines this effigy representation with a folk-like carving style, original fabrications, and inviting light elements to create apt idioms for the current moment.

Alongside Tom's work in the 2nd Floor Gallery, Malayka's portraits focus on two groups of immigrants, the first being members of the Ethiopian Community in Seattle, a nonprofit community organization. The second group was inspired by Malayka's visit to an office of the International Rescue Committee during a day-long event for immigrants to apply for United States citizenship. Malayka's father was an immigrant, and she was inspired to develop this project as a counter-statement to anti-immigrant policy and sentiment.



2nd Floor Gallery, Blanden Memorial Art Museum  
Photo: Hope Thier.

PRESENT / TENSE:  
The Visionary Art of Tom and Malayka Gormally

Robert C. Morgan

The presence of art in today's intensely creative, international environment appears to be unlimited. The fluidity of ideas, technologies, and materials appears more apparent today than ever before, presumably due to breakthroughs made in the late twentieth century. As the categories of art making have become less rigid and less defined, so the possibility of a renewed experiential dimension in art has become increasingly open and variable. Today there is greater access to how we read and understand art as a parallel experience to everyday life. This is combined with a more direct insight into the creative process by which artists engage in an instantaneous rapid-fire atmosphere.

Given our increasingly virtual, invisibly complex networks of global information, the art of Tom and Malayka Gormally would appear to offer a somewhat contrary point of view. Instead of following fashionable trends, their art carries a more tactile resonance where the sense of touch plays a more dominant role. Whereas some might interpret this as "political," others will see it more directly in terms of the "metaphorical," suggesting an ongoing symbolic or poetic narrative. I would suggest the resonance found in their art has elements of both that go beyond any strictly preconceived categories. For many observers, their work is understood as a rarified insight into the kind of life imposed upon those who live outside the American middle class, including artists who identify with the challenges of our human condition as a source of expressive content. This relates to the title of their current exhibition at the Blanden that asserts they are artists living in the "Present / Tense."

In this context we might say the works of the Gormallys have restored the visible in art and thereby overcome the seduction of the invisible through their deeply profound visuality. Each of the artists retains a depth of clarity as to what art should be within the currency of events that increasingly limits our understanding of a democratic world. In contrast to fashion and social media, the Gormallys' take us back to the notion that art is a primary mode of communication, a very basic form of visual utterance. From this perspective, viewers may discover their work as a presence where energy flows between and within their highly evocative, masterfully orchestrated creativity.

Whether we are looking at Tom's ironic brightly lit, steepled church in *One If By Land (Ass Backwards)*, 2017, or Malayka's gouache, ink, and watercolor painting, *Mother With Son Applying for U.S. Citizenship*, 2019, a story unfolds in either case that defiantly confronts the middle-class concept of everyday life. There is both an epic and ironic distillation in these works that emits an intensely visual, emotional experience. Conceptually, our gaze is being pulled forward in Malayka's close-up cinematic drawings, bringing our thoughts closer to the question as to what is real and what constitutes the human experience today. In doing so, we are obliged to come to terms with the meaning of life on the most intimate level in a bygone world perpetually teetering on the edge of apocalyptic fear and septic greed.

Regardless of what medium, style, or proclivity, the artists have chosen to facilitate the experience of the viewer. Rather than foregrounding investment and marketing, the emphasis given to their works moves toward helping those who visit their exhibitions to understand what they are seeing. The focus is on the personal, the communal, and the desire to establish a voice within the international community for refugees, émigrés, and displaced itinerants in search of stability and fulfillment in their everyday lives. The significance is largely contingent on how our extended global network comes together in relation to the personal necessities required to live with one another.

This is definitively revealed in Malayka's penetrating drawings of women from the Ethiopian Community in Seattle or her drawings of immigrants in the process of applying for citizenship through the office of the International Rescue Committee. Malayka's drawings are emotionally moving and to the point. Her distinctly spatial approach reveals a steady accuracy in emphasizing the holistic presence of the figure as a counterpart to her subjects' facial and corporeal expressivity. Her brilliant ongoing series of largely Middle Eastern women (often with children) going through the bureaucratic ordeal of "applying for citizenship" to the United States is captured through the artist's ability to sense her subjects' environment in relation to their desire to overcome anxiety through courage and a sense of well-being. In Malayka's drawings, we sense a human volition on the part of her subjects to become accepted for who they are – not as statistics but as a people with the same concerns anyone would feel no matter what destiny they have been given.

Rather than making trendy objects that drift into the realm of kitsch as occasionally seen in the auctions of New York, London, and Hong Kong, the Gormallys are more interested in how audiences respond to their art on a more basic level and how they might come to understand the work from the perspective of the artists' intentions. These vary from one artist to the next. I can speak of these intentions in a more fundamental way while looking at the drawings of Malayka. In Tom's sculpture, they

appear more complex and therefore more difficult to articulate. His intentions are so intimately connected to the manner in which he works and to the processes whereby his images come into play that language would seem to reduce their importance.

Having met Tom thirty-eight years ago as a graduate MFA student at Wichita State University, I vividly recall his devotion to the physicality of sculpture. This quality would eventually enter into Gormally's work more directly, taking on different forms each step of the way. It is important to note that Gormally does not produce installations. His indigenous Classicism makes him a full-fledged sculptor. He carves. He constructs. He measures and assembles. In addition, he is aware of the message he wants to advance. One of the most indicative of these messages in three-dimensions can be found in *Life Out Of Balance*, 2017 (wood, Plexiglas, and LED lights). The wooden chair is twisted and falling, ready to collapse from its own weight. If I understood it correctly, this is the artist's metaphor of the era in which we are living in today.

Tom's sculpture goes beyond the object into a living nexus that articulates the very presence of how the artist sees and feels on a socio-cultural basis. This is clearly shown in *US*, 2017, a work constructed out of wood, Mylar, LED lights, tungsten light, and Plexiglas rod. The sculpture contains two twisted chairs on either side of a wooden table on which place settings have been carved. A mirrorized map of the continental United States is in the center with a ladder that moves upward towards a tungsten light. Inspired by a 1972 film by Luis Bunuel, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, Gormally's comment is that *US* represents "the lack of civility in the current political and cultural dialogue."

Looking at the "*Fox Series*," completed over the past two years, I am struck by Gormally's material knowledge, the depth of his research, and by his extraordinary ability to put it all together. One of the most striking works is *Fox Leaning on the Truth (Shot Full of Holes) Beneath the Tree of Life with the Well of Knowledge*, 2019. Drawn from the ancient Irish Book of Kells (384 A.D.), a Latin Vulgate text that focuses structurally on the four Gospels, this work is filled with hard-core irony, critical allegory, and absurd humor, transformed from the original source. The metaphorical role of the fox is one of betrayal. It is sly and wily creature unable to represent honesty or truth, echoing the dire problems so overwhelmingly evident at the moment in our current dominion.

Relative to this work, the artist comments as follows: "Truth is the basis of meaningful human relationships, and when the truth is sacrificed for self-serving motives, it destroys trust." Any of the sculptures from the "*Fox Series*" which make this clear, each in its own way. I would suggest taking a close look at *Fox Trap I*, 2018 and *Fox Trap II*, 2019. Clearly the slumbering fox is immune to the ecological changes that

are happening around him, even as the warning is symbolized by the bird positioned on top of the container cage. In *Fox Trap II*, Gormally borrows a figurative detail from Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* as a means to represent the agony of the White Eagle in the midst of this human-instigated disaster.

Clearly the narratives presented in various works by the Gormallys have been deeply felt and diligently studied. Through their art, they have revealed the current Zeitgeist – the desperation that human beings worldwide are being forced to live with. At the same time, the searing emotional content in Malayka's drawings and the prescient assemblages of Tom function as signals of hope. To recognize the realities of today is the first step toward change, regardless of how difficult these realities are to confront. The Gormallys are in the process of opening new pathways towards rethinking where we are today. They are giving us a sense of our personal and communal lives by showing us how the human factor takes the upper hand in the artistry of serious practitioners. They play a central and preeminent role in making changes that resonate as positive through their heightened emotional content that ultimately defines a deftly visionary approach to art.

Robert C. Morgan, Ph.D. is an art historian, writer, artist, critic, curator, and educator. Knowledgeable in the history and aesthetics of both Western and Asian art, Morgan has lectured widely, written hundreds of critical essays (translated into twenty languages), published monographs and books, and curated numerous exhibitions. He has written reviews for *Art in America*, *Arts*, *Art News*, *Art Press* (Paris), *Sculpture Magazine*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, and *Hyperallergic*. His catalog essays have been published by Gagosian, Pace, Sperone Westwater, Van Doren Waxter, White Cube (London), Kukje (Seoul), Malingue (Hong Kong), and Ink Studio (Beijing).



2nd Floor Gallery, Blanden Memorial Art Museum  
Photo: Malayka Gormally.





2nd Floor Gallery, Blanden Memorial Art Museum  
Photo: Malayka Gormally.



Tom Gormally, *Life Out Of Balance*, 2017.  
Wood, plexiglass rod, LED lights; 67" x 24" x 17".  
Photo: Mark Woods.



Tom Gormally, *One If By Land (Ass Backwards)*, 2017.  
Wood, gold leaf, paint, plexiglass rod, LED lights, wire mesh;  
82" x 24" x 17". Photo: Mark Woods.



Tom Gormally, *Fox in a Henhouse*  
(*nod, nod, wink, wink, know what I mean?*),  
2018. Wood, stain, acrylic paint, LED lights, plexiglass rod;  
70" x 17" x 36". Photo: Mark Woods.



Tom Gormally, *Fox in a Henhouse*  
(*nod, nod, wink, wink, know what I mean?*),  
detail, 2018. Wood, stain, acrylic paint, LED lights, plexiglass rod;  
70" x 17" x 36". Photo: Mark Woods.





Tom Gormally, *Fox in a Henhouse*  
(*nod, nod, wink, wink, know what I mean?*),  
detail, 2018. Wood, stain, acrylic paint, LED lights, plexiglass rod; 70" x 17" x 36".  
Photo: Mark Woods.



Tom Gormally, *Us*, 2017.  
Wood, mylar, LED lights, tungsten light, plexiglass rod; 96" x 108" x 60".  
Photo: Mark Woods.





Tom Gormally, *Us*, detail, 2017.  
Wood, mylar, LED lights, tungsten light, plexiglass rod; 96" x 108" x 60".  
Photo: Mark Woods.



Tom Gormally, *Fox Leaning on the Truth (Shot Full of Holes)*  
*Beneath the Tree of Life with the Well of Knowledge*, detail, 2019.  
Wood, plexiglass, gold leaf, acrylic paint, LED lights; 70" x 24" x 20".  
Photo: Mark Woods.

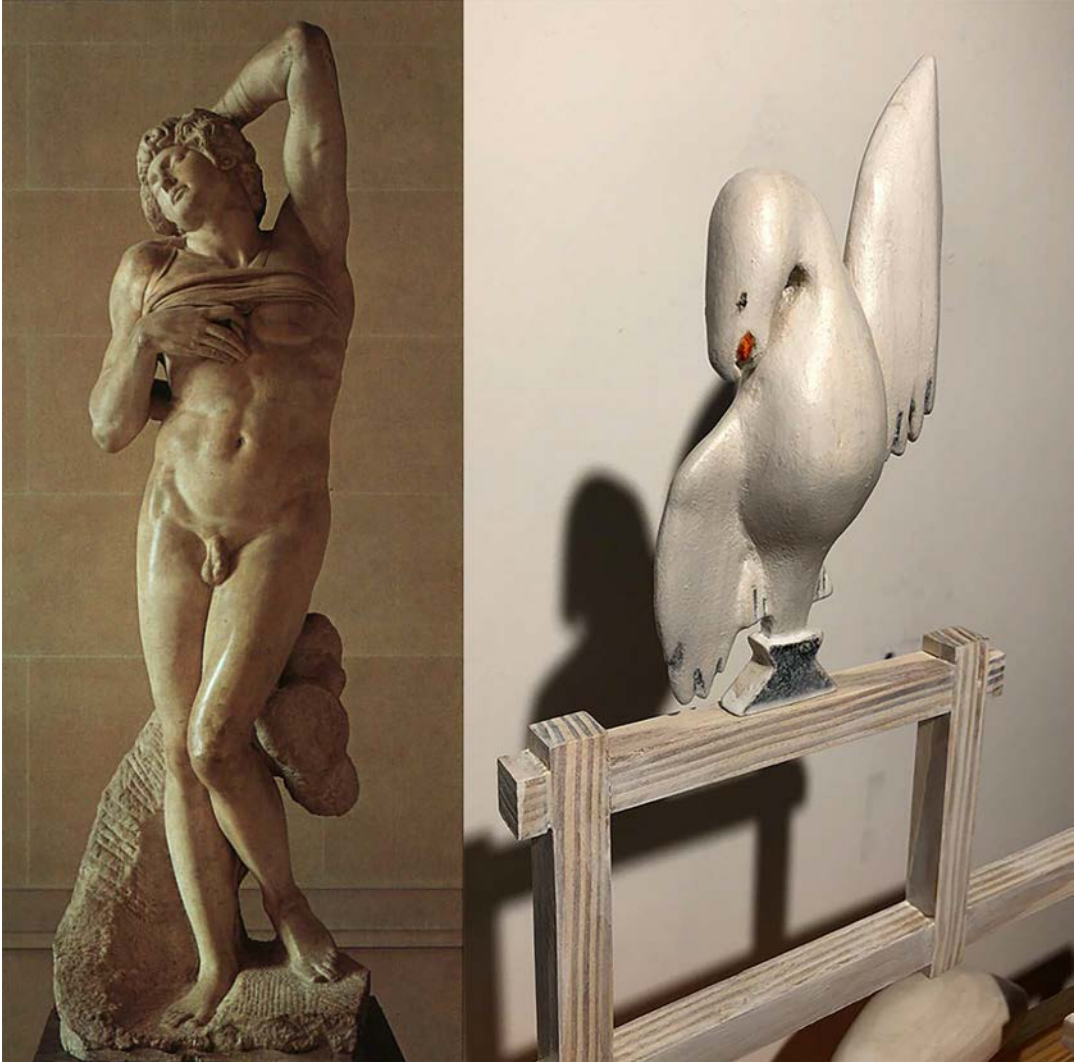


Tom Gormally, *Fox Leaning on the Truth (Shot Full of Holes) Beneath the Tree of Life with the Well of Knowledge*, 2019.  
Wood, plexiglass, gold leaf, acrylic paint, LED lights; 70" x 24" x 20".  
Photo: Mark Woods.





Tom Gormally, *Fox Trap II*, 2019.  
Wood, stain, acrylic paint, plexiglass, LED light; 33" x 27" x 12".  
Photo: Mark Woods.



Left: Michelangelo, *Dying Slave*.

Right: detail of the white eagle at the apex of *Fox Trap II*.



Tom Gormally, *Fox Trap*, 2018.  
Wood, stain, plexiglass rod, acrylic paint, LED light; 65" x 28" x 16".  
Photo: Mark Woods.



Tom Gormally, *Fox Trap*, detail, 2018.  
Wood, stain, plexiglass rod, acrylic paint, LED light; 65" x 28" x 16".  
Photo: Mark Woods.





Tom Gormally, *In Memoriam to a Fox*, 2018.  
Wood, stain, copper, LED light, aluminum, wire mesh; 66" x 30" x 20".  
Photo: Mark Woods.



Tom Gormally, *In Memoriam to a Fox*, detail, 2018.  
Wood, stain, copper, LED light, aluminum, wire mesh; 66" x 30" x 20".  
Photo: Mark Woods.



Tom Gormally, *Fox Hole*, 2019.  
Oil stick, ink, gouache on Arches paper; 24" x 20".  
Photo: Mark Woods.



Tom Gormally, *Fox Swearing on a Stack of Holey Books*, 2019.  
Oil stick, ink, gold leaf on handmade paper; 24" x 20".  
Photo: Mark Woods.





Tom Gormally, *Fox Swearing on a Stack of Holey Books*, 2018.  
Wood, stain, plexiglass rod, gold leaf, LED light, felt; 62" x 21" x 18".  
Photo: Mark Woods.



Malayka Gormally, *Man in Front of a Whiteboard, Applying for United States Citizenship*, 2019. Ink, watercolor, gouache on handmade paper made in India from recycled clothing; 19" x 25". Photo: Malayka Gormally.





Malayka Gormally, *Woman in White, Member of the Ethiopian Community in Seattle*, 2017. Ink, watercolor, gouache on handmade paper made in India from recycled clothing; 25" x 19". Photo: Malayka Gormally.





Malayka Gormally, *Mother and Daughter, Applying for United States Citizenship*, 2019.  
Ink, watercolor, gouache on handmade paper made in India from recycled clothing;  
19" x 25". Photo: Malayka Gormally.



Malayka Gormally, *Woman in NYC Shirt, Applying for United States Citizenship*, 2019.  
Ink, watercolor, gouache on handmade paper made in India from recycled clothing;  
19" x 25". Photo: Malayka Gormally.





Malayka Gormally, *Mother with Son, Applying for U.S. Citizenship*, 2019.  
Ink, watercolor, gouache on handmade paper made in India from recycled clothing:  
19" x 25". Photo: Malayka Gormally.



Malayka Gormally, *Grandmother and Grandson, Members of the Ethiopian Community in Seattle*, 2017. Ink, watercolor, gouache on handmade paper made in India from recycled clothing; 25" x 19". Photo: Malayka Gormally.





Malayka Gormally, *Young Mothers, Members of the Ethiopian Community in Seattle*, 2018. Ink, watercolor, gouache on handmade paper made in India from recycled clothing; 25" x 19". Photo: Malayka Gormally.





Malayka Gormally, *Woman in Red Abaya, Applying for United States Citizenship*, 2019. Ink, watercolor, gouache on handmade paper made in India from recycled clothing; 25" x 19". Photo: Malayka Gormally.



Malayka Gormally, *Two Friends at the Ethiopian Community in Seattle*, 2019.  
Ink, watercolor, gouache on handmade paper made in India from recycled clothing;  
19" x 25". Photo: Malayka Gormally.





Malayka Gormally, *Young Woman, Applying for United States Citizenship*, 2019.  
Ink, watercolor, gouache on handmade paper made in India from recycled clothing;  
25" x 19". Photo: Malayka Gormally.



Malayka Gormally, *Woman in Blue, Member of the Ethiopian Community in Seattle*, 2018. Oil on wood panel; 20" x 16". Photo: Malayka Gormally.





Malayka Gormally, *Woman in a Colorful Dress, Member of the Ethiopian Community in Seattle*, 2019. Ink, watercolor, gouache on handmade paper made in India from recycled clothing; 25" x 19". Photo: Malayka Gormally.



Malayka Gormally, *Aunt and Nephew, Member of the Ethiopian Community in Seattle*, 2019.  
Ink, watercolor, gouache on handmade paper made in India from recycled clothing; 19" x 25".  
Photo: Malayka Gormally.





Malayka Gormally, *An Elder Member of the Ethiopian Community in Seattle*, 2017. Ink, watercolor, gouache on handmade paper made in India from recycled clothing; 25" x 19". Photo: Malayka Gormally.



Malayka Gormally, *Woman in Traditional Garb, Member of the Ethiopian Community in Seattle*, 2019. Ink, watercolor, gouache on handmade paper made in India from recycled clothing; 25" x 19". Photo: Malayka Gormally.





Malayka Gormally, *Summer*, 2015. Oil on panel; 24" x 36".  
Photo: Malayka Gormally.



East Gallery installation, Blanden Memorial Art Museum.  
Photo: Hope Thier.



East Gallery installation, Blanden Memorial Art Museum.  
Photo: Hope Thier.





East Gallery installation, Blanden Memorial Art Museum.  
Photo: Hope Thier.





Tom Gormally, *Witness*, 2001.  
Cedar, Poplar, Oak, electric light; 90" x 72" x 96".  
Photo: Arthur Aubry.

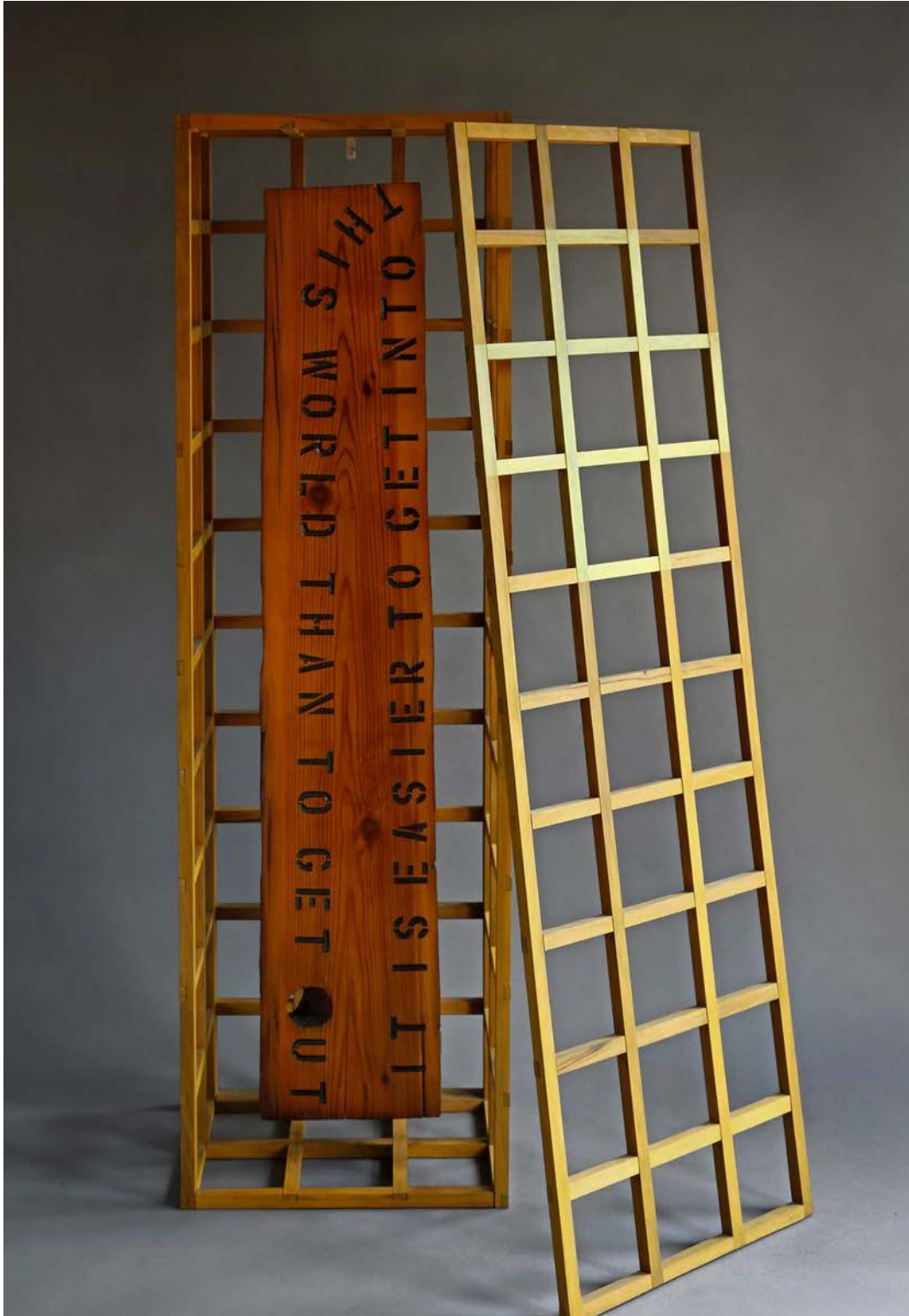


Tom Gormally, *Witness*, detail, 2001.  
Cedar, Poplar, Oak, electric light; 90" x 72" x 96".  
Photo: Arthur Aubry.



Tom Gormally, *Load*, 2008.  
Ebonized and stained oak and pine, Alaskan yellow cedar; 60" x 144" x 24".  
Photo: Mark Woods.





Tom Gormally, *The Last Words My Father Said to Me*, 2003.  
Poplar, Cedar, wood dye; 60" x 36" x 19".  
Photo: Mark Woods.



Tom Gormally, *Throne*, 2016.  
Wood, flock, deer skull, gold leaf, silver leaf, paint, electric light;  
84" x 60" x 24". Photo: Mark Woods.



Tom Gormally, *Throne*, detail, 2016.  
Wood, flock, deer skull, gold leaf, silver leaf, paint, electric light; 84" x 60" x 24".  
Photo: Mark Woods.





Malayka Gormally, *Last Summer*, 2015.  
Oil on linen; 48" x 60".  
Photo: Malayka Gormally.



Malayka Gormally, *Summer Travels*, 2015.  
Oil on panel; 19.5" x 27".  
Photo: Malayka Gormally.





Malayka Gormally, *Three Friends*, 2015.  
Oil on panel; 24" x 36".  
Photo: Malayka Gormally





Malayka Gormally, *Two Musicians*, 2015.  
Oil on linen; 18" x 24".  
Photo: Malayka Gormally





Malayka Gormally, *So I Can See You*, 2016.  
Oil on panel; 16" x 20".  
Photo: Malayka Gormally.

## Tom Gormally

Tom Gormally has exhibited nationally and internationally for 40 years, including exhibitions at the Katonah Museum of Art (NY), Des Moines Art Center (IA), The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (MO), and others. He has created site-specific sculptures in Seattle and Belfast, Northern Ireland, for the Horsehead International Outdoor Sculpture Exhibitions. Press coverage includes reviews in Sculpture Magazine and The New Art Examiner, as well as BBC TV and BBC radio interviews. He is a past recipient of an NEA award for sculpture and was awarded a 2015 Artist Trust Fellowship. In 2019, Tom was awarded a Civita Institute Drexler Family Fellowship, as well as an Allied Arts Foundation Artist Award. Tom currently has a two-person exhibition (with his wife, Malayka Gormally) at the Blanden Memorial Art Museum (IA).

Tom, a disabled Vietnam-era veteran, utilized the GI Bill to attend the California College of Arts and Crafts (CCAC) and, later, obtain his BFA from Minneapolis College of Art and Design and his MFA from Wichita State University.

[TomGormallySculpture.com](http://TomGormallySculpture.com)

## Malayka Gormally

Malayka Gormally is a figurative painter, independent curator, and commission portrait artist. Her paintings are included in the City of Seattle Portable Works Collection and the Safeco Insurance Collection and have exhibited in group and two-person exhibitions throughout the United States. In 2017 she was awarded a 4Culture Art Projects Grant to create portraits of immigrant and refugee women in King County, Washington.

Since 1997, Malayka has painted portraits on commission for over 150 collectors in the United States and Europe. Her portrait clients include individuals who have served as board members for the Seattle Art Museum, the Henry Art Gallery, and the Palm Springs Art Museum. One of her portraits was shortlisted for the 2014 Royal Society of Portrait Painters Annual Exhibition in London.

[MalaykaGormally.com](http://MalaykaGormally.com)



## Acknowledgments

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Mark Woods for his photography of Tom's sculptures

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Tom Gormally, *Fox Swearing on a Stack of Holey Books*, 2018.  
Wood, stain, plexiglass rod, gold leaf, LED light, felt; 62" x 21" x 18".  
Photo: Mark Woods.

