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# Elmhurst Art Museum redoes popular '80s Par Excellence exhibit/mini-golf course

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By MYRNA PETLICKI  
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Mini golf fans get a sweet challenge on Hole #6 of “Par Excellence Redux: The Front 9” at Elmhurst Art Museum with “Just Desserts” by Latent Design. (Latent Design)

The School of the Art Institute of Chicago scored a huge success in 1988 when they combined art with recreation by creating Par Excellence, a mini golf course composed of holes designed by artists. Elmhurst Art Museum is reviving that concept with Par Excellence Redux, a playable mini golf course created by artists, designers, and architects.

In order to adhere to COVID protocols, the 18-hole course is being divided into two parts. The Front 9 is playable from July 7-Sept. 26; The Back 9 runs from Oct. 13-Jan. 2, 2022.

The exhibit is curated by Christopher Jobson, founder and editor-in-chief of Colossal, which its website defines as an “international platform for contemporary art and visual expression.”

scene in Chicago itself and realized that I kept getting pulled outside of Chicago to go to the Elmhurst Museum because they kept having these great shows,” Jobson said. He recalled an exhibit where they had pinball machines installed inside the museum.

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He was meeting with the museum’s Executive Director John McKinnon about two-and-one-half years ago when McKinnon began talking about the original mini golf show. “I didn’t know it existed,” Jobson admitted. “We realized immediately there would be a huge opportunity there.”

The first step was meeting with people from the original exhibition two years ago. After that, Jobson did an open call for artists and designers to create holes for the course.

“We had people from all over the Midwest and a couple of people a little bit further who submitted dozens of ideas to us,” Jobson said. “The Museum and I looked at everything together and we picked

Creatures are lurking in the “Castle,” Hole #1 of “Par Excellence Redux: The Front 9,” at Elmhurst Art Museum, designed by Robin Schwartzman and Tom Loftus (also known as A Couple of Putts). (Robin Schwartzman and Tom Loftus)

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Because of COVID, the project was delayed for over a year. “It’s been done, just sitting and waiting,” the curator noted.

Artist Annalee Koehn, who participated in the original 1988 Par Excellence exhibit, designed a hole for Redux. Koehn’s hole for the original exhibit was called “Determine Your Fate.”

“It was kind of a combination of a carnival Midway game and a miniature golf hole,” she said. “You putt down this lane and your ball bounces off some obstacles. There are 18 or 20 slots and the fortune is written on the floor of the slot. Once your ball goes into the slot, that’s your fortune.”

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The hole Koehn designed for Redux is also called “Determine Your Fate,” although she has made some changes.

“It’s a recreation of the structure so it looks the same,” Koehn said. “The fortunes have been updated.”

One 1988 fortune related to the anti-drug “Just Say No” campaign. Depending on which of two holes your ball landed in, you would either “Just Say No” or “Just Say Yes.”

The current hole has fortunes ranging from song lyrics to a quote from Buddha.

Koehn is looking forward to playing mini golf when the course opens. “I’m really curious to see the other holes — the contemporary take on this,” she said.

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Katherine Darnstadt, founding principal architect of Latent Design, and her team created a hole called “Just Desserts.”

“For us as a design firm, as architects, every so often we look for projects that — even though they’re small — elicit joyful moments and this fit the bill,” Darnstadt said. “Over the past year of shifts and turns, I think we need whimsy even more.”

The Latent Design hole is definitely whimsical. “We started to play with elevation and colors,” Darnstadt reported. “We took a cue from the highest point of Chicago which anecdotally happens to be an ice cream shop, Rainbow Cone. We have a base level with different stripes of color which represent the different Rainbow Cone flavors. We also have a ramp that gets you into the main hole and that drops into a rail that spirals down into the secondary rainbow hole.”

Darnstadt said their entire office plans to play the course.

Other holes were designed by Julie Cowan, Current Projects, Andrea Jablonski & Stolatis Inc., Jesse Meredith, Gautam Rao, Robin Schwartzman & Tom Loftus (also known as A Couple of Putts), and the museum’s Teen Art Council.

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Curator Jobson indicated that this has been a really unique project for him. “Being able to bring something that’s a pastime enjoyed by groups of people or families and have that collide with contemporary art is very rare,” he said. “And to know that this show was done 33 years ago and we’ve been entrusted with the torch of putting on this show again, with some of the original artists, that is just thrilling.”

There will also be a display of newspaper clippings, photos, and other information about the original exhibit which toured downstate Illinois and then became a commercial venture. ArtGolf.

## 'Par Excellence Redux: The Front 9'

**When:** July 7-Sept. 26

**Where:** Elmhurst Art Museum, 150 Cottage Hill Ave., Elmhurst

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**Tickets:** \$10 adults; \$8 ages 65 and over; \$5 ages 5-15; free for ages 4 and under; 25 % less for museum members

**Information:** 630-834-0202; [elmhurstartmuseum.org](http://elmhurstartmuseum.org)

*Myrna Petlicki is a freelance reporter for Pioneer Press.*

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