

Avian Station 2023

Bernard Williams (American b.1964)

Painted steel

Funded through the Illinois Capital Development Board, Art in Architecture Percent for Art Program with funds resulting from the 2014 completion of the F Wing renovation at GSU

Collection of the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park
2023.01

Bernard Williams is a native of Chicago, Illinois. He holds a BFA Degree from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, and an MFA from Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. He also studied at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine, 1987. Williams has taught at The School of the Art Institute, Chicago State University, and Chicago Public Art Group.

The studio practice of Bernard Williams delves into the complexities of American history and culture through painting, sculpture, and installation. His work fosters an open-ended dialogue, exploring identity, flattening hierarchies, and questioning our collective identity. Themes like risk, adventure, conquest, personal status, privilege, and mechanical development are brought to life in various forms.

Often, his work begins with archives from museums or libraries, using documentary photographs as blueprints for sculpture. He aims to merge the historical roots and contemporary expressions of cultural elements as diverse as NASCAR, the American Abstract Expressionist painters, and the history of flight. This research often leads to a form of self-projection, where he engages with the past, present, or future through reconstruction, reinterpretation, or role play.

Cultural convergence and expansive worldviews are central themes in his architectural structures, and he incorporates personal biographical elements alongside aspects of mass culture—advertising, fashion, sports, comics, television, and movies. In “Avian Station” Williams makes direct reference to the Quilts of Gee’s Bend, quilting patterns in general, and the “Birds in Flight” pattern specifically (the repeated triangles motif) and in this way connects thematically with “Large Planar Hybrid” by Richard Hunt, and “Icarus” by Charles Ginnever two pieces in the collection at theNate that make direct reference to flight, freedom, and our turbulent human history.