

## Roll over to Lowell for freewheeling family fun

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"Freewheelin': The Art of Rolling"

WHERE: The Revolving Museum, 22 Shattuck St. in Lowell, Mass.

WHEN: Through Feb. 12. The museum is open Thursday-Sunday from noon-4 p.m.

ADMISSION: General admission is \$3, or \$2 for students and seniors. Members and children 5 and younger are admitted free.

INFORMATION: Call 1-978-937-2787 or visit [www.revolvingmuseum.org](http://www.revolvingmuseum.org).

The world said it couldn't be done, but the folks over at the Revolving Museum in Lowell, Mass., have nevertheless reinvented the wheel.

The art gallery is celebrating its 20th anniversary with "Freewheelin': The Art of Rolling." Guest curators Rebecca Hoffberger, founder of the much-celebrated American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore, and Doreen Manning, editor of the Middlesex Beat, have collected more than 100 mobiles, art cars, decorated shopping carts, mobile mini churches and installation pieces in a single revolutionary show.

The Revolving Museum is labeling it a "creative traffic jam," but rest assured this is one traffic jam you won't mind getting caught in.

"We've always been a nomadic institution with a theme of mobile artwork," said museum founder Jerry Beck. "Our history is one of bringing art to the community, engaging the people. Inclusiveness is the key for us, and mobility facilitates that, I think. So this show was a nice way to further the metaphor."

Beck isn't kidding around. The first show he put on under Revolving Museum auspices was in a group of abandoned train cars in 1984.

"That first show was a magical experience," Beck said. "We were coming from the art-school scene which was based on competition and commerce and getting famous, and then we all went and lived in these trains together. People who would normally never have collaborated were suddenly having this life altering experience of sharing and art for art's sake.

"I never planned for another show, but we got a lot of press and everybody kept saying, 'You've got to do this again,'" Beck laughs. "And that's how we accidentally started the museum."

After that inaugural event, the Revolving Museum went on to transform six cars into giant pieces of interactive luggage. They took such unlikely canvases as hotel housekeeping pushcarts and ice-cream trucks and painted them gleefully into art. They built a "Wheels of Wonder" bus, which was commissioned by the Rhode Island School of Design and was on the road for five years. They built a book mobile and a mini racetrack for hundreds of mini art cars.

The impetus for all this movement and unconventional art seems to have its roots in two things: Beck's love, from childhood, of circuses and carnivals and his short stint as a guard at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Alvina Laudani's untitled piece is included in the exhibit, which celebrates the museum's 20th anniversary. Alvina Laudani's untitled piece is included in the exhibit, which celebrates the museum's 20th anniversary.

"When I was working at the MFA, it just seemed so cold and emotionless," he said. "You couldn't touch anything because it was all so precious, and it just felt like this huge barrier. I wanted to create something that was the complete opposite - something like a carnival - where you could

play loud music and touch art. Interaction, communication, emotion - all of that.”

For Beck, it’s about more than just decor, however. It’s about changing the way people conceptualize art and their place in that world.

“I’ve never met whoever it is that makes the decision of what to put on a pedestal and what to throw away as trash, of what is great and what isn’t,” he said. “Personally, I think that’s up to individuals and not me to decide. Everyone can be an artist. Everyone has creative power. Our current show has art by professionals, self-taught artists and kids, and the quality is there in the work of all three. It’s not anti-intellectual to say there is talent in everyone.

“That’s one reason I’m really so proud of the museum’s history: It’s always had a mind of its own,” Beck added. “We’ve always invited people in to bring whatever they see fit to the table, and never forced our own ideas on artists. That scares people away.”

“Freewheelin’” runs through Feb. 12, but Beck said the Revolving Museum crew has no plans of slowing down when it closes. There are several projects in the works, including an art car carnival and more outreach with local teens and schools.

“This 20th anniversary is just a new beginning point,” Beck said. “The museum is always driven by the moment. Who knows where it will go next? I have no idea. It’s a very exciting place that way. A conversation can lead to an entire exhibit I may never have dreamed of - and it probably will one day very soon.”

And, of course, it is also still getting used to its new digs in the heart of historic Lowell.

“This is the most traditional space we’ve ever been in, and we love it,” Beck said. “But I keep finding myself thinking, ‘Geez, there’s got be some way to subvert this.’ We’re really all about turning preconception on its head.”