

the art of travel

At the Chicago Cultural Center, Christine Tarkowski takes a journey of the imagination

Walking through her recent exhibition at the Chicago Cultural Center, Christine Tarkowski did not begin at the beginning. She plowed ahead—past the hulking cardboard ship at the entrance—to the middle and then to the end before circling back.

Was she merely enforcing the show's title, "Last Things Will Be First and First Things Will Be Last," or was she making a larger artistic statement? "I like the process of going in a circle," she says. Indeed, her prevailing motif is a double helix, its two strands spiraling into oblivion. The shape is emblematic of a human truth, she believes: "You never meet a person who's traveling the same path."

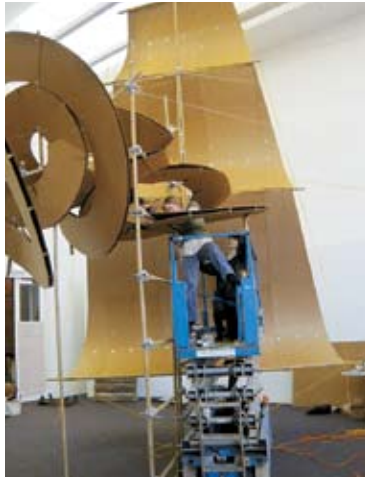
That thought came to mind several years ago when, of all improbable events, an Amish woman attempted to convert Tarkowski to Christianity. The experience inspired her *Imitatio Dei*, an incomplete geodesic dome that creates a quasi-religious space inside. She built the dome's triangular components out of two-by-fours, into which she poured concrete with colored glass shards embedded in it. As compact fluorescent bulbs illuminate the glass, the glow evokes stained-glass windows. "If I set the stage for a congregation, I thought, maybe something would come," she explains. (Nothing did.) At the cultural center, the church-dome sat near walls covered in black-and-white posters screen-printed to resemble 19th-century broadsides, only these were trumpeting our culture's nonreligious belief systems, capitalism and democracy.

Tarkowski interpreted the idea of traveling in circles literally with nine miniature parking structures, complete with myriad ramps, that she produced during a three-month residency at Kohler Co. in Wisconsin. Intentionally wobbly, these cast-iron sculptures perched on a gallery's

table surrounded by framed photo etchings of satellites, traffic roundabouts, and other objects that imply circular movement. Her own vessel for circumnavigation was the ship at the show's entrance. To make the billowing sail, she attached cardboard sheets to bamboo scaffolding. The ship looked like it would sail right out the window, onto Michigan Avenue, if it weren't for the ballast behind, an enormous cardboard double helix. —*Cassie Walker*

Clockwise from top left: During Kohler Co.'s arts-industry residency program, Christine Tarkowski, an associate professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, produced miniature cast-iron parking

structures that started out as Styrofoam positives with resin-bonded sand molds. Molten iron, poured directly into the molds, burned out the Styrofoam and eventually hardened. The nine finished pieces became a single artwork, *Methods of Egress*. At Tarkowski's studio, the finished cardboard sail of *The Things Which So Nearly Concern Our Temporal Salvation* displayed a silk-screened pattern derived from the floor of the Pantheon in Rome. Her team raised the sail's 24-foot-high bamboo mast at the Chicago Cultural Center. Steel clamps attached a 17-foot-long cardboard double helix to the sail's bamboo rods.



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UNFOLD



Top, clockwise from left: Imitatio Dei's pewlike wood bench sat inside the curve of a 12-foot-tall geodesic dome segment. Newspaper broadsides covered nearby walls. Cotton curtains separated two of the cultural center's galleries. Compact fluorescents protruded from the dome's cast concrete. Bottom: Tarkowski consulted Architectural Graphic Standards for diagrams for the cast-iron parking structures, displayed on a Douglas fir table and accompanied by the photo etchings of Things That Go in Circles.

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