

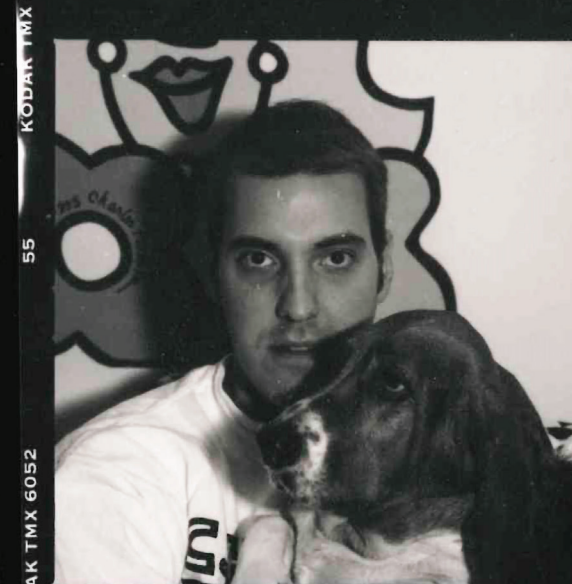
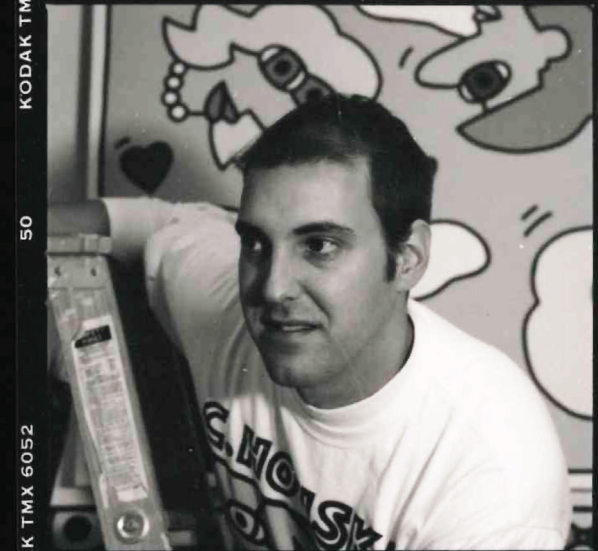
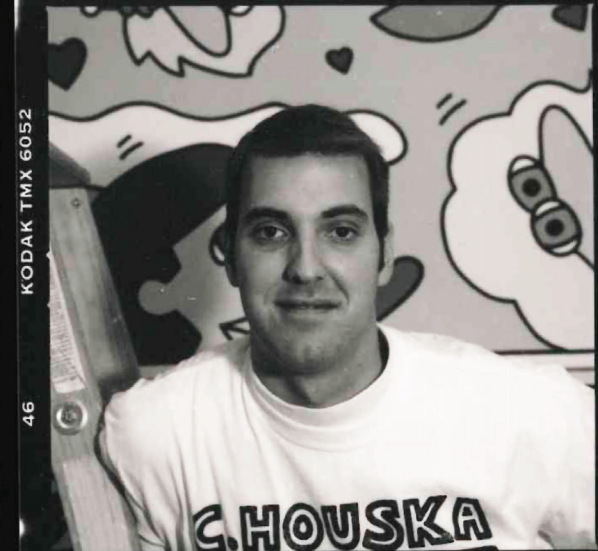


Boo Charles Hawke

MASTER OF PLAY



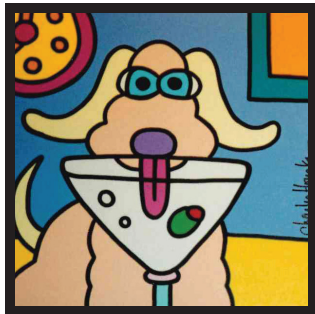
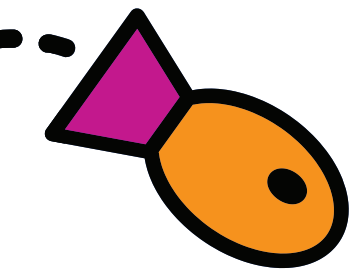
WORLD CHESS
HALL OF FAME
& GALLERIES



**CHARLES
"CHARLIE"
HOUSKA
WAS BORN
ON JANUARY 7,
1965, IN
SPRINGFIELD,
ILLINOIS.**

From an early age, he was drawn to art but was unsure how to pursue it as a career. His grade school art teacher recognized his innate artistic talent, and their encouragement fueled his passion. This pattern of recognition and support continued through high school, where his work consistently stood out.

During this time, Houska took additional art classes at the Springfield Art Association, experimenting with different techniques and subjects. Twenty years later, he would go on to exhibit there. As he sought to navigate the art world and earn a living, he became drawn to advertising and graphic arts, fascinated by the artistic elements behind advertisements. His personal style naturally lent itself to commercial art.



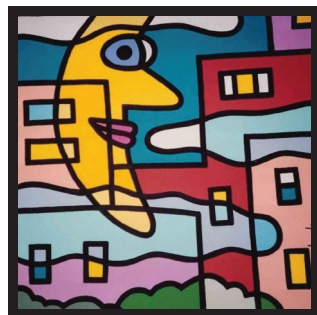
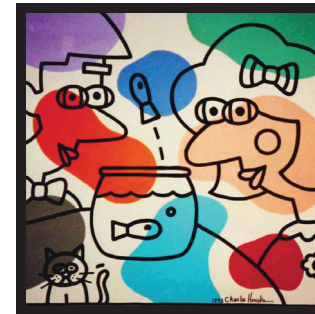
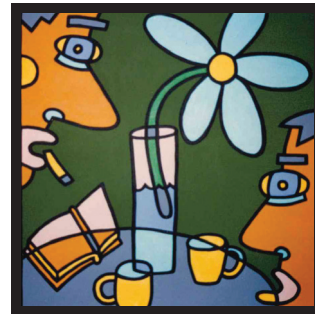
noiserie, an 18th-century European interpretation of Chinese artistic traditions. He developed a fascination with Foo Dogs (imperial guardian lions), leading him to incorporate them into his artwork. His extensive collection of over 400 Foo Dogs, acquired from antique stores and as gifts, inspired a decade-long series featuring these protective figures.

Following his Asian-inspired series, Houska turned his focus to Greek influences. Drawn to the blue-and-white color palette of Greek architecture, he incorporated elements such as the Greek Key, windmills, and layered interior and exterior perspectives in his paintings. This period marked a departure from his usual character-driven work, allowing him to explore more intricate details while maintaining his recognizable style.

Another significant series, his Hotel & Motel Series, originat-

ed from spontaneous sketches that evolved into a collection of around 30 works. These pieces, characterized by neon-lit motel signs against dark backgrounds, evoke nostalgia for roadside travel and Americana.

Houska also found inspiration in Mexican traditions with his Día



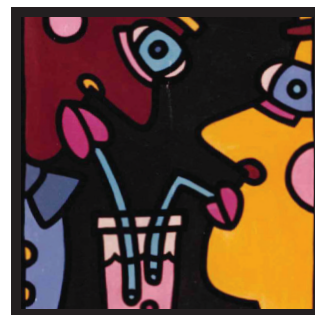
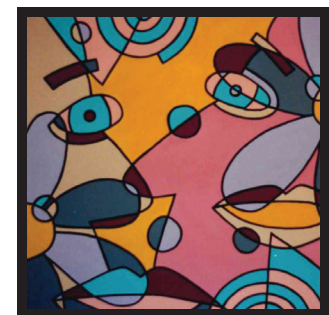
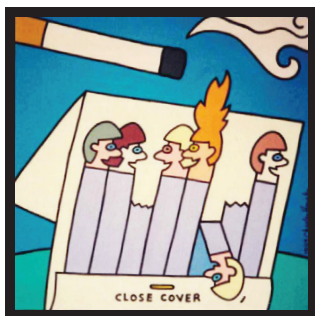
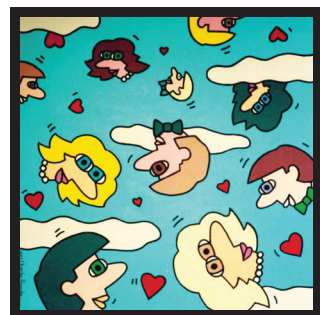
Houska attended Illinois State University in Bloomington-Normal, IL, where he pursued a degree in Visual Communications while also taking fine art courses in painting and drawing. He was particularly inspired by pop artists like Roy Lichtenstein and Pablo Picasso, though his art professors pushed him toward a more academic approach to art. However, it was the emergence of Keith Haring that reaffirmed Houska's artistic direction. Haring, known for his bold outlines and cartoon-like imagery, inspired Houska to fully embrace his own style, much like Andy Warhol had influenced Haring.

After graduating in 1983, Houska moved to Chicago and took a job as a graphic artist at a binder company—his first and only “9-to-5” job. The technical work left little room for creativity, and he soon realized it was not the right fit. In his free time, he painted and customized denim jackets, shoes, purses, and t-shirts, selling them in boutiques around the city. As his success grew, he decided to leave the corporate world and pursue art full-time. With financial support from his parents, he gained the confidence to commit to his artistic career fully.



In the early 1990s, Houska began developing his signature style, starting with his Fish and Fishbowl series in 1995. Initially a small detail in one painting, the fishbowl became a recurring motif in his work, evolving into his personal artistic symbol. He often includes a fish or fishbowl in every painting, sometimes subtly hidden near his signature. This theme reflects his love for water—he was a letterman swimmer in high school—and the idea of being “in a fishbowl” as an exhibiting artist.

Houska's artistic influences expanded to include chi-



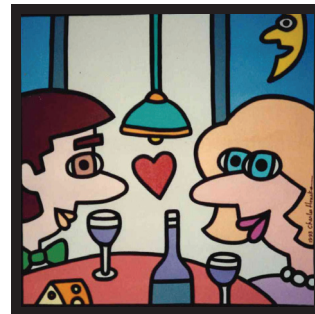
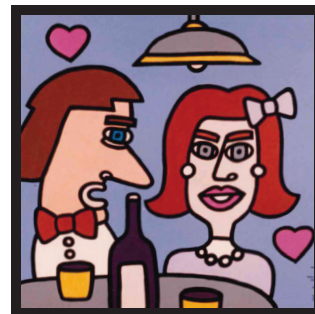
de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) series. His vibrant skulls, intertwined with snakes and muted versions of his signature fish, pay homage to this celebration of life and memory. His work embraces the holiday's joyful, reflective spirit while showcasing his unique artistic interpretation.

Throughout his career, Houska's most recognizable icons have been dogs, cats, and fish. Though he once considered becoming a veterinarian, his deep connection with animals is evident in his art. While his animals are not given specific names, they are instantly recognizable as

“Houska Dog” or “Houska Cat.” Additional recurring symbols include the sun, moon, butterflies, and bees, all contributing to his whimsical and playful aesthetic.

Beyond his artistic achievements, Houska has been deeply involved in charitable work. He has collaborated with numerous non-profits, including PAWS (Pets Are Wonderful Support), where he designed the organization's logo. His first major gallery exhibition at the Duane Reed Gallery was tied to PAWS, with a portion of the proceeds donated to the organization. The show was a major success, gaining media attention, including a cover story in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and establishing Houska as a prominent regional artist.

One of Houska's most meaningful commissions came from St. Louis Children's Hospital, where his colorful dog and cat sculptures were installed in the atrium, creating a welcoming



atmosphere for young patients. His work continues to bring joy to children and families facing difficult circumstances.

Houska also collaborated with the Bank of Springfield, designing the bank's mascot, “BOS Dog.” This character appears on debit cards, plush toys, and



Over the past several decades, Houska has successfully navigated the changing tastes of the art world. While some artists feel “trapped” by their own signature style, he has embraced his commercial success, expanding his work across different media and product lines. His ability to merge business acumen with creativity has allowed him to remain self-employed for over 30 years.

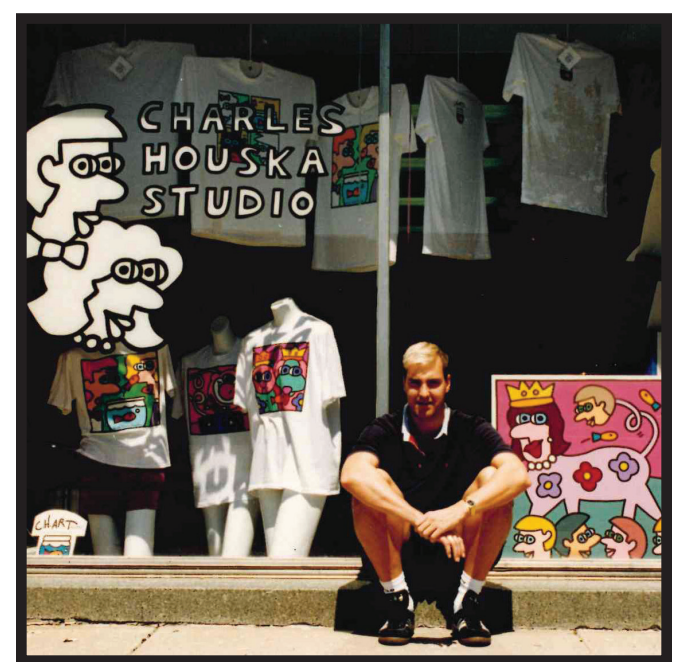
In the early 1990s, gallery owner Duane Reed introduced Houska to Saint Louis.

After successful exhibitions at Reed’s Taylor Avenue gallery, Houska fell in love with the city and eventually relocated from Springfield. His early exhibitions, featuring Keith Haring-inspired black outlines on walls and glow-in-the-dark wooden fish cutouts, garnered significant attention and cemented his reputation in the local art scene.

Today, Houska continues to create while supporting other artists through Houska Gallery in Saint Louis’ Central West End. Though he no longer

paints at the same pace, he remains dedicated to fostering creativity in the community. Reflecting on his career, he acknowledges that while he may not fit the stereotype of a “real” artist who spends every waking moment in the studio, his work has brought immense joy to himself and countless admirers.

As the World Chess Hall of Fame celebrates a lifetime of his achievements, Charles Houska’s legacy as a vibrant and imaginative artist continues to shine.



In the mid-1990s, Duane Reed was introduced to Charlie Houska

through a mutual friend, Michele Krevenas, formerly of Laumeier Sculpture Park, The National Museum of Transportation, and The Springfield Art Association in Illinois. Krevenas recognized that Houska would be a great fit for Duane's gallery, and Duane was immediately drawn to Charlie's work. He recalled that Houska was "new on the scene, quirky, had an attitude, was outgoing, and always had a group of people following him." Describing their early relationship, Reed said, "Envision Pig-Pen from Charlie Brown, but instead of dirt, Charlie was enclosed in a cloud of glitter."

In 1996, Duane gave Houska his first Saint Louis exhibition when his gallery was on Taylor Avenue—at the time, Houska was living in Springfield, IL. The gallery, located in a two-story brownstone, featured Houska's painted characters along the stairway walls leading into the exhibition space, which displayed his original paintings on canvas and dozens of painted wooden cutouts. The exhibition was in collaboration with PAWS (Pets Are Wonderful Support—an organization assisting HIV and AIDS patients with pet care), and Houska's love for animals made an immediate impact. His dog and cats became a hit, and his association with PAWS grew so strong that he eventually designed their logo and helped raise significant funds for the organization over the years through artwork donations.

For nearly 30 years, Duane and Charlie have remained close friends and neighbors. The Duane Reed Gallery now sits directly across the street from the Houska Gallery, and their exhibition openings often coincide, creating a vibrant and celebratory atmosphere on those festive evenings. When asked what he admires most about Charlie, Duane shared:

"I like that he's 'out there' in the best way. He has a big personality but doesn't throw it around. He's easy to be around—more in the shadows but still very present. He's not the type to flit around the room; instead, people come to him, and he chooses

who he'll spend time with. He's someone you can have a long-term relationship with without needing daily interaction. When you're with him, it's always fun—like catching up with a favorite cousin during the holidays. You just pick up where you left off."

Reed also reflected on watching Houska's growth over the years: "It's been interesting to see him become a bigger presence. He knows his art but remains humble. He's surrounded by wonderful people who love and support him, and he has amazing connections in the community. I admire how much he's evolved. He's not just a 'cartoon man'—that's one component, but he's so much more."



When asked what Charlie Houska brings to Saint Louis, Reed highlighted his consistency: "Charlie is active, engaged, and always participating. He's great for the artists he represents, and his humor and personality make an impact. Every city has someone who stands out, and in Saint Louis, Charlie Houska is that person."

And we can all agree—that's undeniably true.
Interview with Shannon Bailey & Duane Reed March 6, 2025

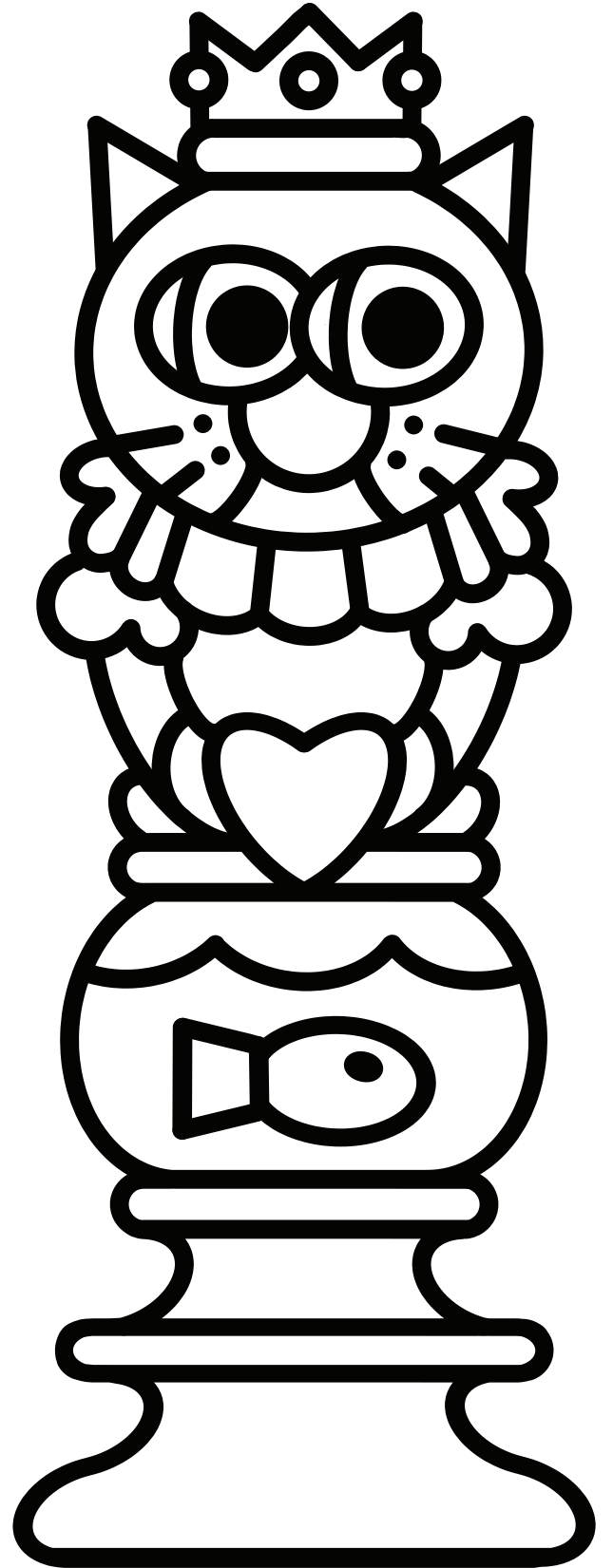
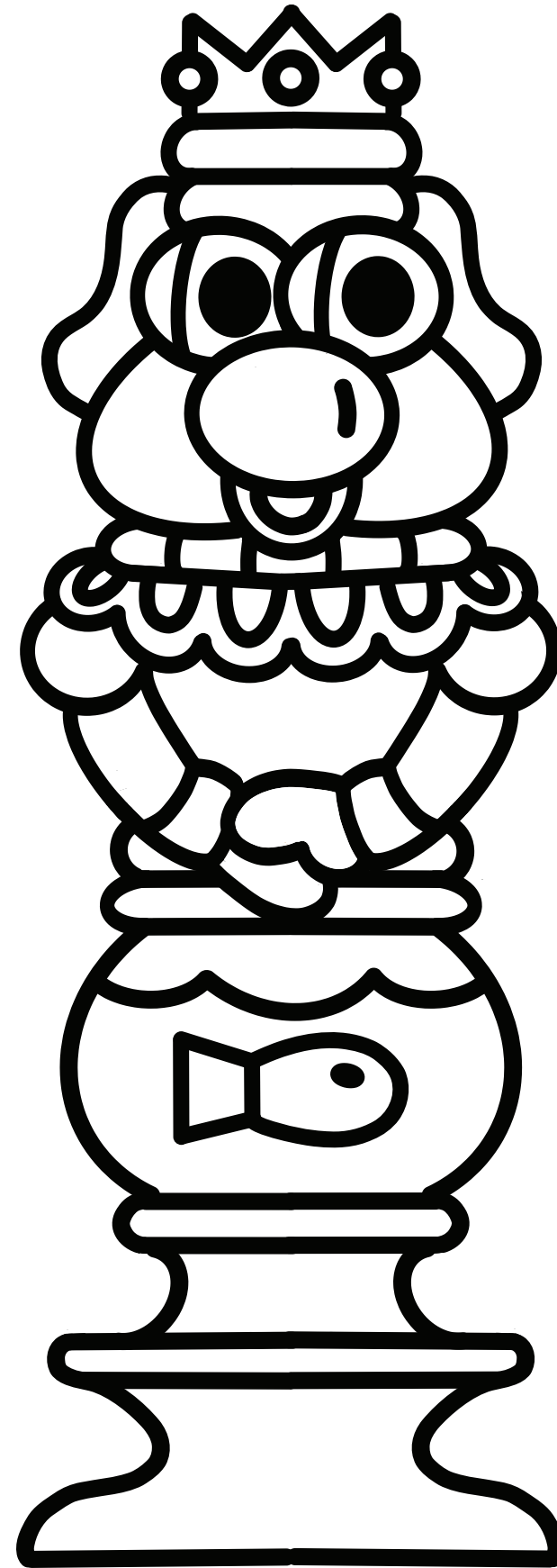
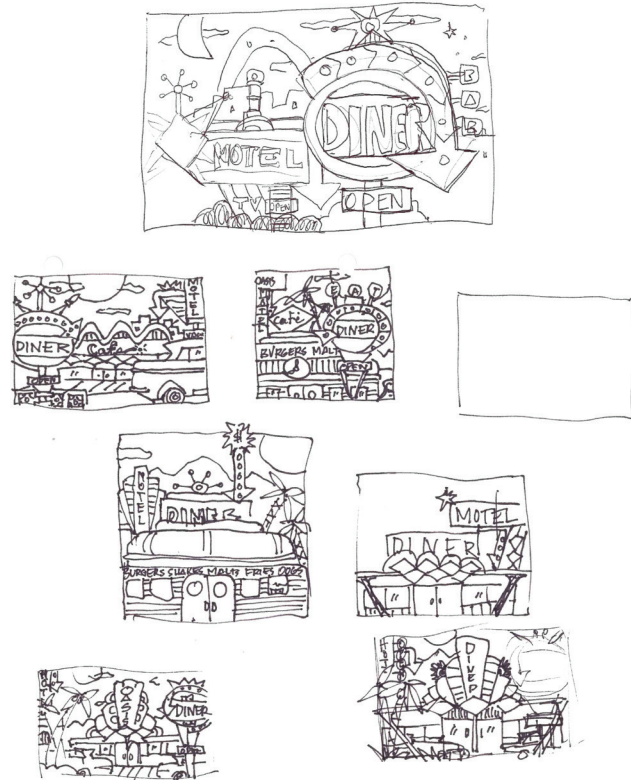
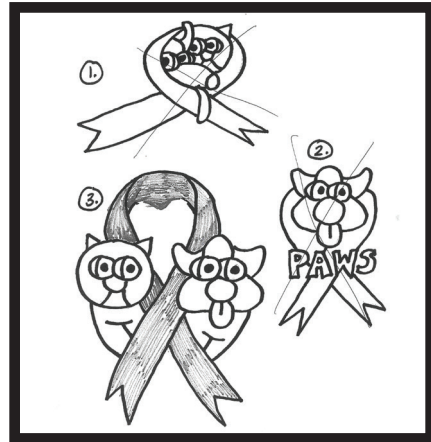
Duane Reed opened the gallery in his name in 1994, where he has exhibited and represented successful contemporary artists such as Michael Eastman, Jun Kaneko, Joseph Piccillo, Albert Paley, Wendell Castle, Dale Chihuly, and Rudy Autio. He has over 20 years of professional experience in the art world and is nationally regarded in multi-media art. Reed possesses a passionate commitment to the representation of national and international artists, with special attention to introducing innovative artists working in ceramics,

glass, and fiber. Exemplary in his expertise, Duane has curated over 300 exhibitions both at his gallery as well as others and has lectured on a variety of art topics, including memberships with the Renwick Gallery Caucus, The Mint Museum's Founders' Circle, Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis and AIDA (Association of Israeli Decorative Arts). He is a former trustee of the American Craft Council and currently serves on the national boards of The Watershed Ceramic Center and the Creative Glass Center of America.

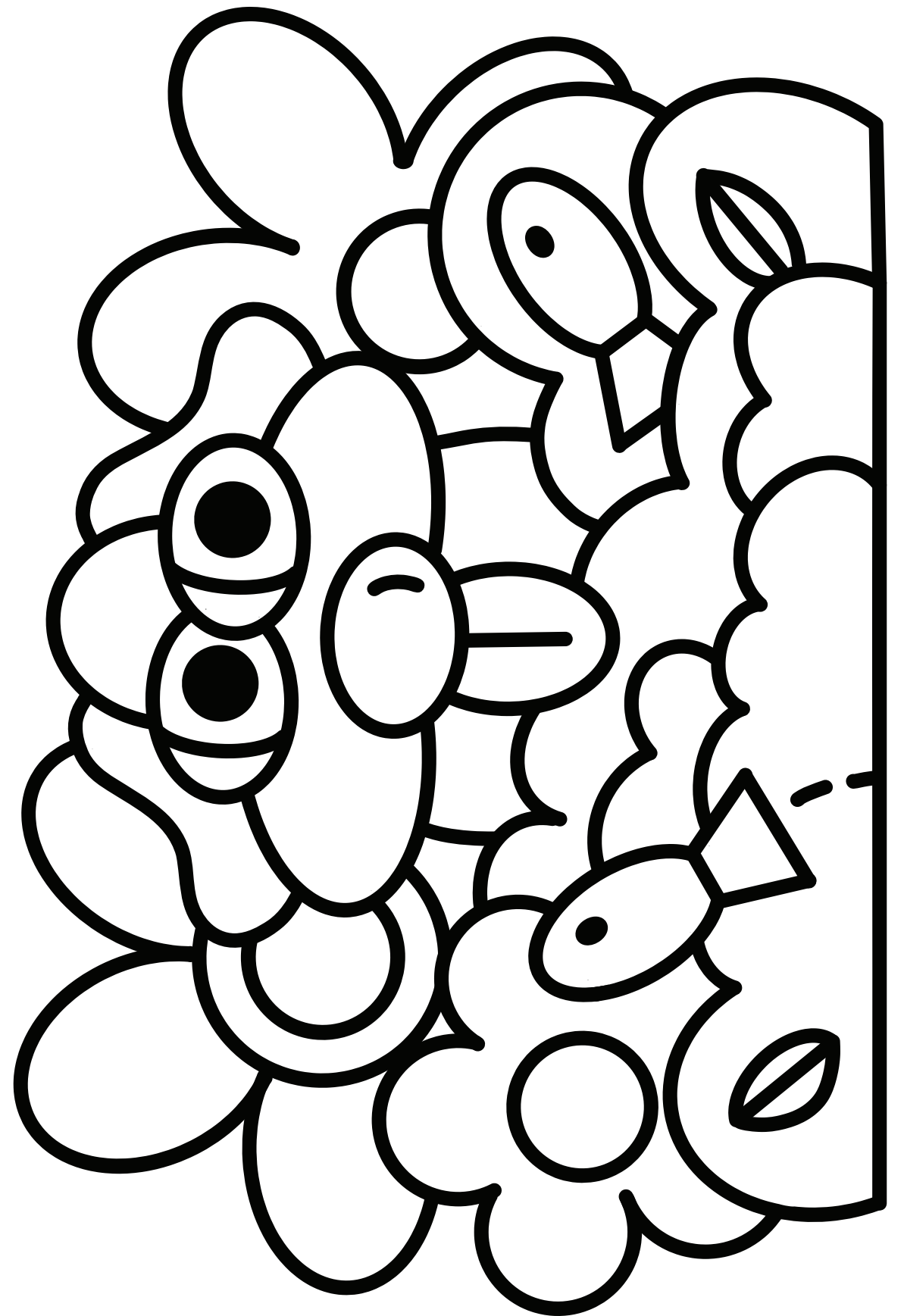
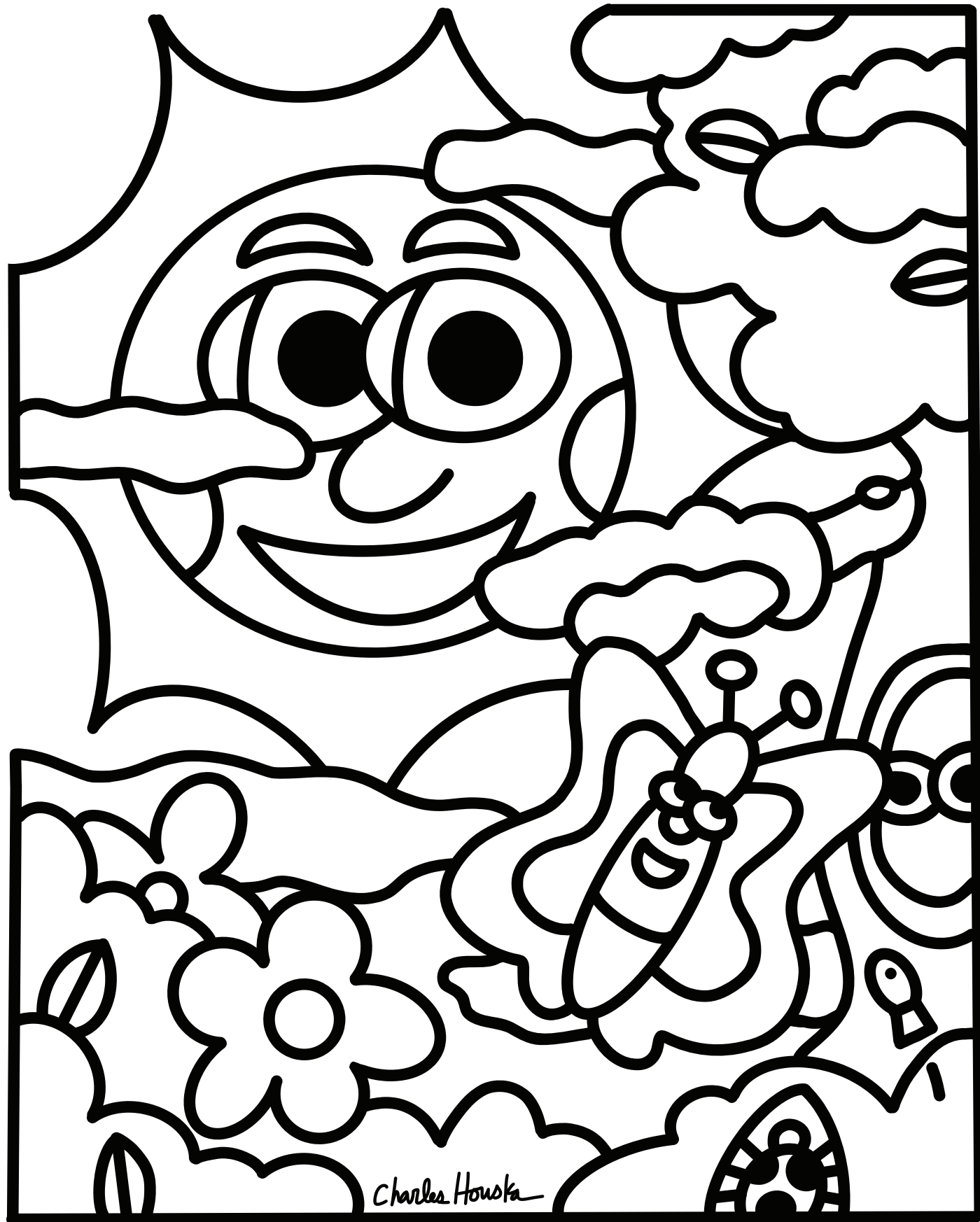


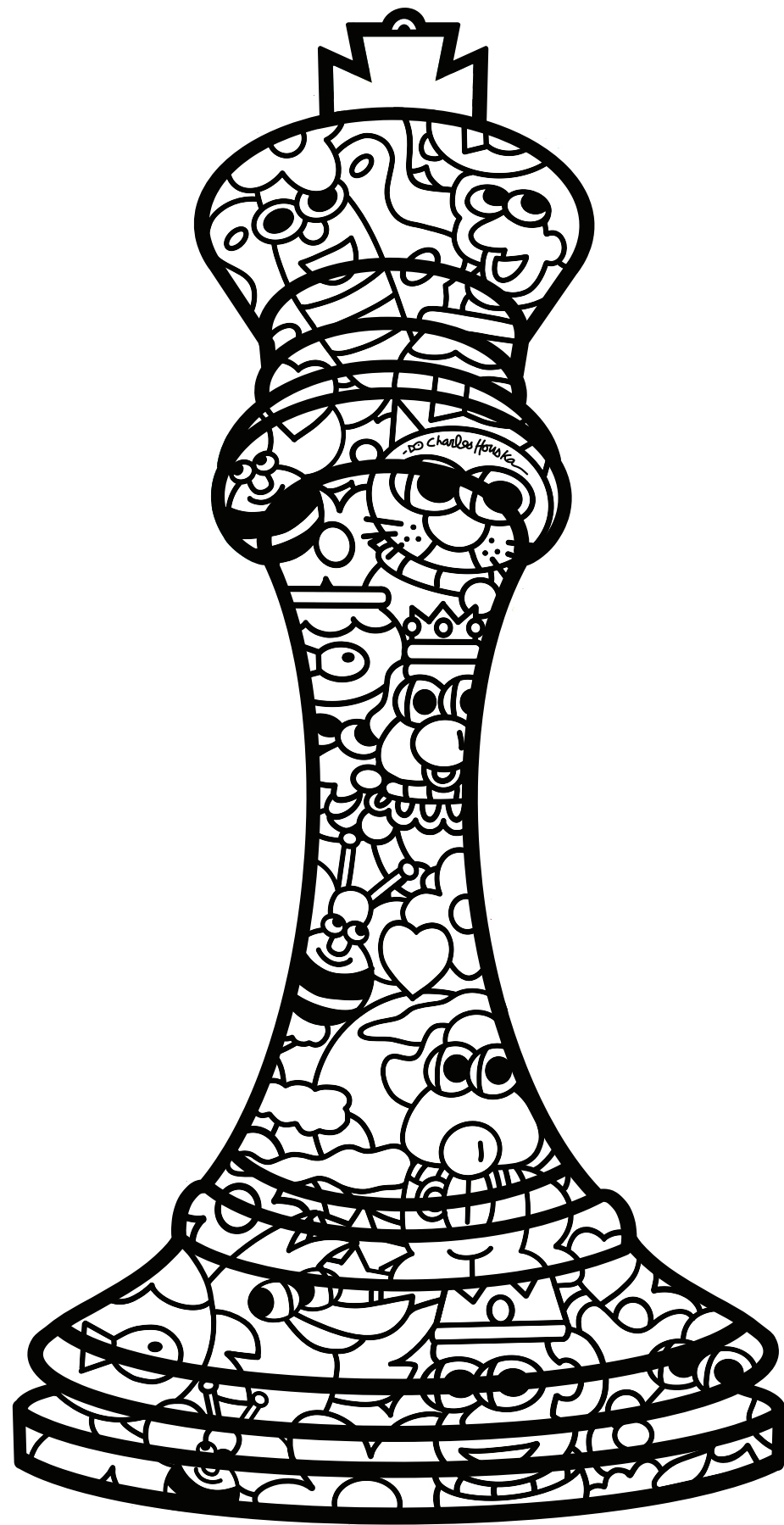
It all starts with a sketch!

Charles Houska's deep and lasting relationship with the PAWS (Pets Are Wonderful Support) began during his first-ever exhibition at the Duane Reed Gallery, where a percentage of the proceeds were donated to the organization. To this day, Houska remains deeply connected to PAWS—volunteering his time, donating artwork, and even designing the organization's official logo, which features his signature characters within the outline of a dog paw.



Complete your own Houska masterpieces on the following pages!

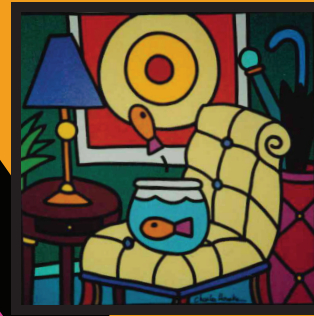


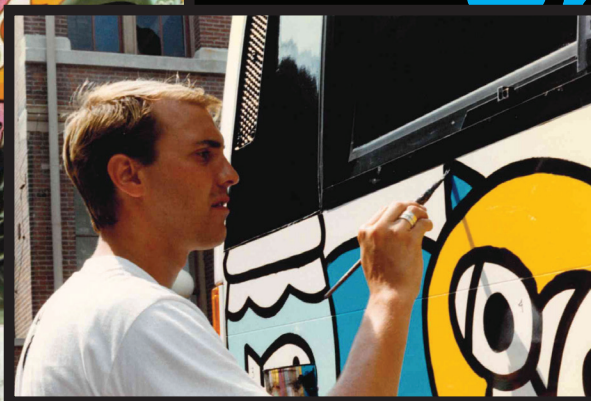
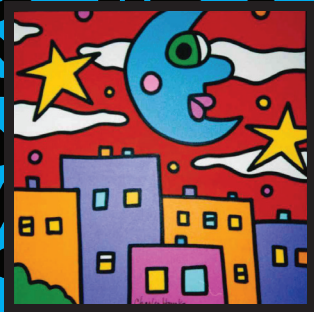


Bank of Springfield

One of Charles Houska's significant regional commissions is his collaboration with the Bank of Springfield, Illinois. A Springfield native, Houska designed the bank's mascot, "BOS Dog" (pronounced Boss Dog), bringing his signature style to financial education and helping to teach kids the importance of saving for their future.



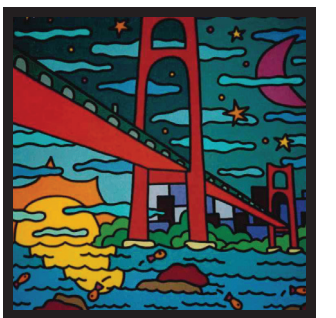
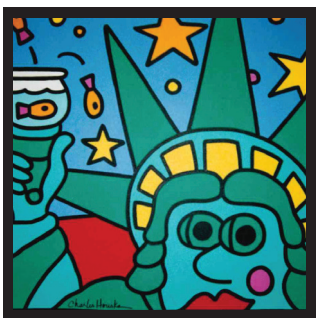




St. Louis Children's Hospital

As part of this special commission, several Houska-designed sculptures of dogs and cats were placed throughout the hospital's atrium. Their vibrant colors and playful, uplifting designs help create a welcoming and joyful atmosphere for young patients and their families. Many of these sculptures remain on display today, continuing to bring comfort and smiles to children. Houska was deeply moved by this project, hoping that his happy, whimsical characters would brighten the hospital experience and offer a small moment of joy and relief to those facing difficult circumstances.





Charlie Houska's work is so colorful and whimsical. It has exquisite details that are brought to life with close inspection which may not be noticed at a quick first glance. We have several pieces in our collection. His work can be found in public spaces throughout the city and his gallery in the Central West End has become a gathering place for friends and art enthusiasts during McPherson art gallery walks. His work and gallery have really become a Saint Louis institution.

Ron Jagels and Tim Bahr

I first became introduced to Charlie's art about 25 years ago. My children, Katie and Scott, and I attended a PAWS event with my cousin Nancy Houska, Charlie's mother. My daughter and I have since become enamored of his artwork and are happy and proud that he has found success with his happy, brightly-colored style. It's always fun to spot Charlie's art installations around the city and sometimes share in their enjoyment—for example, helping to paint a Bi-State bus Houska-style at a Pride Festival and playing miniature golf at the Sheldon's *Golf the Galleries*, where Charlie designed one of the holes. I congratulate him on his exhibition, where I hope that many others will learn about him and experience his creations!

Janet Bassel

Charlie has been a dear friend for over 20 years. I have loved being involved in his life and deeply appreciate his art. So fun and happy. One of my first purchases was the Monkey in a Fez painting featured in this retrospective. Charlie's art graces my home, office, farm and son's home. He is a fixture in the CWE and the Saint Louis area art scene, and his gallery provides a place for Saint Louis's best local artists to showcase their works.

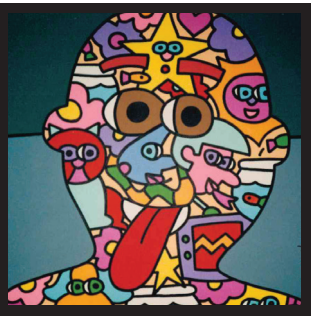
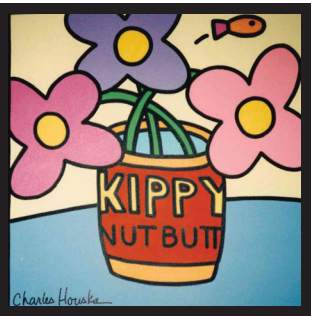
Ted Wight

I first heard about Charles Houska when I started working with PAWS-STL, a group dedicated to helping people living with HIV and AIDS maintain the beneficial relationship they had with their pets. Charles had designed the logo for the group, and I was immediately drawn to its bright colors and animal motif. PAWS held several fundraising events, and whenever they did, Charles would always donate a painting, and it seemed I always went home with the work of art. Other groups also benefited from Charles' largesse, and soon, my waiting room at Hillside Animal Hospital became a de facto gallery of Charles Houska's works. Even the man himself became a client at Hillside. But I think he was always a little shy sitting in the waiting room, with other clients never realizing the artist whose work they were admiring was sitting next to them.

The art of Charles Houska speaks to me in a way I never imagined. I do not consider myself a serious collector of art, but I consider it an honor to have been able to amass so many pieces. At one time, he told me I was one of the largest collectors of his work. Later, I commissioned him to paint a mural on my old clinic building. Random people would stop by to take pictures of the mural after reading about it. It brought tears to the eyes of myself, my staff, and many lovers of his work when I had to raze the building last year. It was a very difficult phone call to let Charles know about the demolition. But many of us at Hillside have bricks saved with some of the bright colors still visible. My wife also gave me a present of a photograph of the mural that now hangs in our house.

I consider Charles Houska a friend and I am very happy that his work is being recognized and honored. You cannot look at a Charles Houska painting and not smile and feel happy. Thanks for all the memories.

Dr. Ed Migneco



We've had the pleasure of knowing Charlie for many years, and it's been incredible to watch him build an amazing, supportive community of loyal friends, clients, fans, and fellow artists across the country. His work in both his career and his gallery is nothing short of impressive. Beyond his own success, Charlie has dedicated himself to helping emerging artists in the region by mentoring them, hosting monthly showcases in his gallery, and offering them increased visibility through his loyal network, the Saint Louis art scene, and his social media platforms.

Charlie's generosity extends far beyond his art—he's also donated pieces to raise money for several local charities in Saint Louis, further demonstrating his commitment to the local community.

Charlie has become a well-known figure in the region, with his bold, vibrant, and playful artwork making an impact all over Saint Louis. His cheerful designs bring so much joy and positivity to those who get to experience them. It's always exciting to follow Charlie and the Houska Gallery, as they consistently inject much-needed vibrancy and energy into the local art scene.

Corey Melzer

My relationship with Charlie is the kind I have always hoped for throughout my artistic career. I am thrilled to celebrate his work and share my gratitude for his mentorship and friendship. From our initial meeting, we discovered that we are kindred spirits, quickly recognizing the creative potential in collaborating. I feel incredibly fortunate to witness Charlie navigate the world as a true artist, both in life and business. He shares his gifts to bring happiness to others, understands the intrinsic value of art and design, and champions every person who walks through his gallery.

Lauren Tracy

Charlie takes a bold, whimsical approach in his artwork as he interprets the world. It's one you're invited to live in. This approach reflects his imaginative personality.

Bill Donius

For a year, we had the pleasure of showcasing Charlie's work at the Foundry Art Centre, and the public's response was nothing short of exhilarating. His art radiates pure joy, offering a refreshing experience that simply invites enjoyment without demands. Beyond his incredible talent, Charlie himself is a truly kind and genuine soul. Whenever I know he'll be at an event, I eagerly look forward to seeing him, knowing his presence will bring warmth and a smile.

Hilda Andres

Bright. Colorful. Charlie. Charlie's work brings a sense of whimsy & joy to our home.

Jeffrey Kapfer

Grazie Mille, Charlie! A Magical Character You Are! The Gallery Walls have a Fantasy All Their Own! Le Belle Immagini!

Metra Mitchell

Charlie Houska has been a friend, a business partner, and someone whose advice I turn to when navigating the arts. I look forward to working with Charlie for many years to come.

Justin King

Charlie Houska is the personification of art: As an artist, a galleriest, and a collector, Charlie's talent, keen eye, and kindness have deeply touched and enriched every aspect of our city's art community.

Philip Slein

CHARLES HOUSKA: MASTER OF PLAY

May 1, 2025-April 5, 2026

Curated by Shannon Bailey, Chief Curator,
World Chess Hall of Fame & Galleries

The World Chess Hall of Fame (WCHOF) acknowledges Dr. Jeanne Cairns Sinquefeld and Rex Sinquefeld, whose generous support have made all of our exhibitions possible.

The World Chess Hall of Fame would like to thank all of our lenders who made this exhibition possible, including: Charles Houska; Todd Alan; Hilda Andres and Jessica Mannisi from the Foundry Art Centre; Susan Barrett; Janet Bassel; Bouhasin / Melzer Bill Donius and Jay Perez; Cabanne Howard; Ron Jagels and Tim Bahr; Pete Jusich; Shahradd Khodamoradi; Bryan W. Knicely; Mike Livingston; Dr. Anna Migneco; Kelly Moran; Mel Pashea and Ray Simon Nick Schleicher; David Sewall and Jeff Kapfer; Philip Slein; Dr. Jerry Thurman; Dean VanMeter; Andrew Walker; Monica Dyson and Joan Whaley from the Bank of Springfield; Ted Wight.

Additionally, we would like to thank Duane Reed, Lauren Tracey, Justin King; Metra Mitchell; Dr. Ed Migneco

The WCHOF sincerely apologizes if anyone was omitted from the acknowledgements. We will update any further printings.

WCHOF STAFF

General Manager Joy Bray | Chief Curator Shannon Bailey
Curator Emily Allred | Assistant Manager James Knapp
Curatorial Assistant Abby Byer | Development Lauren Bauman
Education & Outreach Kathryn Adamchick
Events Coordinator Mary McGuire
Events & Program Manager Brittany Mosier
Exhibitions Manager Nick Schleicher
Finance Norah Friel, Cathy Callahan, Kathleen Hall
Gallery Manager Matt Dauphin | Graphic Design Sam Balmer
Installation & Research Jim Gildehaus, Max Schaerer Emily Billhartz,
Lauren Darling, Amanda Greene, Max Evans, Megan Greene,
Carrie Harper, Asher Harris, Erin King, June Swan, Emily White,
David Woolfolk, Aahron Young
IT Specialists Erik Arnson, Danny Machuca
Marketing & PR Brian Flowers, Courtney Suthoff,
Q Boutique Insert Name, Insert Name, Insert Name, Insert Name,
Registrar Kate Sanford

MIND. ART. EXPERIENCE.

Related programming and a pdf of this brochure are available for download at worldchesshof.org. Donations support our exhibitions, education, outreach, and events.

World Chess Hall of Fame & Galleries
4652 Maryland Avenue, Saint Louis, MO 63108
(314) 367-WCHF (9243) worldchesshof.org @WorldChessHOF

The mission of the World Chess Hall of Fame is to educate visitors, fans, players, and scholars by collecting, preserving, exhibiting, and interpreting the game of chess and its continuing cultural and artistic significance. The Museum does not discriminate or permit harassment or discrimination on the basis of gender, race, color, national and ethnic origin in the treatment of individuals with respect to employment, or admission or access to Museum facilities, programs, or activities.



*Financial assistance for this project has been provided
by the Missouri Arts Council, a state agency.*

