



# Lord of the LEGOs

A traveling exhibit reveals how a New York artist turns a simple toy into sculptural masterpieces. **BY JILL BECKER**

Unwrapping his Christmas presents back in 1978, the last thing 5-year-old Nathan Sawaya suspected was that one of those packages would hold the key to his future. But that's exactly what happened.

Beneath the curly ribbon and shiny holiday paper was a common childhood toy—a set of LEGOs. “I remember ripping into the package and building a LEGO house right there, oblivious to the rest of Christmas morning,” Sawaya recalls. Today, building things out of LEGOs is Sawaya’s full-time job, and the fruits of his labors can be seen in a nationwide touring exhibit called “The Art of the Brick,” currently on view at the Stamford Museum in Stamford, Connecticut, through August 18.

The only exhibition to ever focus exclusively on LEGOs as an art medium, “The Art of the Brick” demonstrates Sawaya’s unique skill at sculpting the colorful blocks—or “bricks,” to use correct LEGO-speak—into elaborate, architectural works of art. The more than 30 pieces on display include portraits of Lindsay Lohan and Alfred Hitchcock, an oversize hand and giant sunflower, and several life-size three-dimensional male figures in varied poses, one of which tugs at his chest as a stream of yellow bricks spills out.

Asked the secret to making such spatial structures, Sawaya revealed, “At this point, I see the world in little rect-

angles. Sometimes I catch myself staring at a building or even a person and breaking down what it would look like out of LEGO.”

For more information on “The Art of the Brick,” including a tour schedule, visit [www.brickartist.com](http://www.brickartist.com).

*Nathan Sawaya in his New York studio, amid a few of his LEGO masterpieces.*

## Portrait of an Artist

Talking LEGOs with Nathan Sawaya.



### What's the biggest piece you've ever done?

The largest installation I've ever built was a billboard for the film *Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium*. It measured over 53 feet in length and 15 feet high, and had well over half a million pieces.

### How long does it take to make one of your creations?

It depends on the size and subject matter. One of my life-size human forms takes about three to four weeks. The skeleton of a tyrannosaurus rex I did, which measures over 19.5 feet, took an entire summer.

### If you make a mistake midway through, do you have to pull apart all the blocks and start over?

Usually I can catch the mistake before it's too damaging and only have to take apart a portion of the sculpture. Sometimes the sculpture will already be glued together, which makes it much more difficult to take apart. Fortunately, I'm good with a chisel.

### How many LEGOs do you own?

I have about 1.5 million LEGO pieces in my inventory at any one time. And one Lincoln Log. I don't know how that got in there.