

He Wrapped Landmarks in Fabric. Years Later, His Art Turned Up in a Dumpster.

Hundreds of paintings by Francis Hines had been thrown away when a Connecticut man, Jared Whipple, found them — and a new life mission.

By **Amanda Holpuch**

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The gauze-wrapped building towered over the East Village like a bandaged wound. It was May 1979 and the artist, Francis Hines, had covered an abandoned five-story tenement with 3,500 yards of white fabric, loosely sealing inside the littered drug needles and crumbled walls.

At the time, a friend of Mr. Hines said, the soft, billowing installation brought “life, beauty and possibility” to the East Village, then an emblem of civic neglect.

Mr. Hines earned a pinch of critical acclaim for wrapping this and other New York City structures, including the Washington Arch, in fabric, before he disappeared from the art world. He died in 2016 at 96.

His work was rediscovered a year later by Jared Whipple, a Connecticut man who found hundreds of Mr. Hines’s paintings in a dumpster and who has since made it his mission to get Mr. Hines the attention he thinks the artist deserves.

In the past five years, Mr. Whipple, 40, has pored over Mr. Hines’s journals, corresponded with the artist’s friends and relatives and dug up archival footage. His work as a self-taught Hines scholar will reach a milestone this week when some of the paintings found in the dumpster are exhibited for sale.



Mr. Hines stretching some of the 800 yards of nylon parachute fabric that he used for a sculpture in the Port Authority Bus Terminal in 1981. Keith Meyers/The New York Times

The solo exhibition opens Thursday at the Hollis Taggart gallery in Southport, Conn., and will be accompanied by a smaller presentation in New York City.

Mr. Hines’s escape from obscurity began in September 2017, when Mr. Whipple was invited to a rundown barn by a friend who had been hired to clear it out and knew Mr. Whipple liked to salvage discarded material.

In a dumpster outside he found neat stacks of hundreds of canvases wrapped in heavy plastic and assumed it was the work of a hobbyist.

“As we started opening them up, that’s when we realized there might be something more to it,” Mr. Whipple said.



Jared Whipple, left, with one of the paintings by Mr. Hines. Jared Whipple



The paintings were found in a dumpster outside a barn that Mr. Hines once used as a studio. Jared Whipple

Mr. Whipple, a mechanic who also does building maintenance for churches, said he was drawn to the brightly colored depictions of smashed cars and car parts. He decided to haul the collection to his warehouse, where he spent more than a decade building an indoor skateboarding park.

Mr. Whipple learned the identity of the artist after finding one of the paintings signed with his full name, Francis Mattson Hines. An online search led Mr. Whipple to a book that Mr. Hines’s wife, Sondra Hines, self-published about her husband’s most recognized work: the Washington Arch installation. In 1980, he used 8,000 yards of white polyester to wrap the arch as part of a fund-raising campaign by New York University to restore the monument.

In a video that Mr. Whipple provided, a former New York Times arts reporter and critic, Grace Glueck, praised the installation.

“Well I think it’s very handsome and as I’ve said to you before, anything that covers up Washington Square Arch, which I’ve always thought was spectacularly ugly, I find attractive,” Ms. Glueck said.



Hundreds of people gathered in Washington Square Park in Manhattan in 1980 to watch Mr. Hines direct the wrapping of the arch in 8,000 yards of fabric. Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

Mr. Hines, who worked as a commercial illustrator, continued to sculpt, paint and sketch after the momentous installation but failed to attract significant attention from gallerists.

For decades, he would ship his finished work to a barn in Watertown, Conn., that he rented for storage and had used as his main studio in the 1970s, Mr. Whipple said.

In the last decade or so, the owners of the barn repeatedly asked Mr. Hines to move the art because they wanted to sell the property.

He never did. Instead, he let the protected art pile up under dirt, grime and animal feces, leaving the project for another day — or another person. After Mr. Hines died, his family took the things that meant the most to them, leaving behind the trove that Mr. Whipple found.

Mr. Whipple has an insatiable appetite for information about the artist and has contacted his friends and associates, who have shared photos, video and letters. Mr. Whipple spent two years searching for a photographer, Ken Hellberg, who let him search his basement for 35-millimeter slides of Mr. Hines's work.



Mr. Hines wrapped an abandoned building in the East Village in heavy gauze in 1979. "The wrap has nothing to do with any social statement," he said. "I'm interested in the enormous energy that takes place when these forms are under the tension of binding." Ken Hellberg

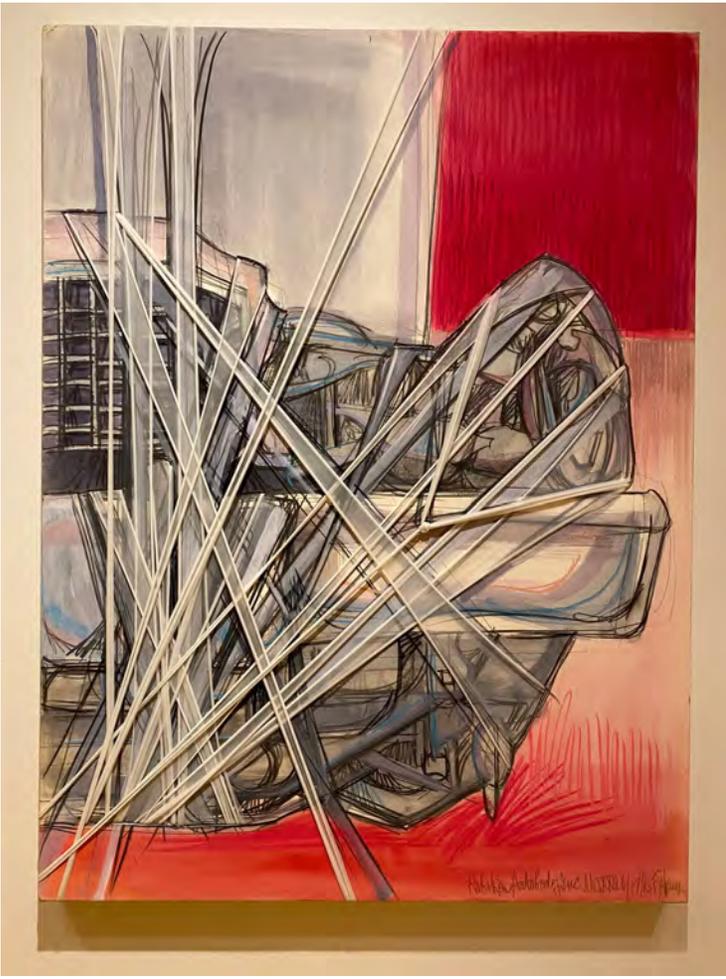
The Rev. Alan Johnson, 78, who knew Mr. Hines for decades and considered him one of his closest friends, said in a telephone interview that he was grateful for Mr. Whipple's discovery and persistence.

Mr. Johnson was an official of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, which sponsored the East Village project in 1979, and was interviewed by The Times about it in 1979:

"Francis Hines has chosen a place of the city that's in trouble and brought something of life, beauty and possibility to it," Mr. Johnson said.

He and Mr. Hines would share their successes and sorrows over single malt scotch at the White Horse Tavern and take trips to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which Mr. Johnson said was one of the few places Mr. Hines would visit north of 14th Street in Manhattan. The artist always insisted that they visit only the African art wing.

"He would go down, look at artifacts, at these beautiful bowls and pictures and he would say 'people with their hands made this and they made something that would be functional and useful,'" Mr. Johnson said.



Two of Mr. Hines's paintings that were found in a dumpster. Jared Whipple

Jared Whipple

Mr. Johnson said Sondra Hines, who died in 2013, would have appreciated that her husband's work was gaining new recognition. In one catalog of his work, Mr. Hines wrote a dedication to Sondra: "Without her talents and devoted work much of what I am about would never see the light of day."

Mr. Johnson said Mr. Whipple was an ideal guardian of his friend's art because he approaches projects with a practical, hands-on style in keeping with Mr. Hines's philosophy that "art is solving problems."

Jonathan Hines, Mr. Hines's son, said in a statement provided by Mr. Whipple that it was "fate" that a figure outside the art world discovered his father's art and that it would not have happened if he had decided to keep the art, instead of throwing it away.

"The bottom line is that my father receive the recognition that he deserves," Mr. Hines said.

The new attention to Mr. Hines's art has drawn comparisons to the works of Christo, the Bulgarian-born artist, who with his wife and collaborator, Jeanne-Claude, used fabric to cover and create structures including the Arc de Triomphe. Christo — who used only his first name — died in 2020.

The Connecticut gallery that will be exhibiting Mr. Hines's work starting this week specializes in bringing attention to lost and forgotten art. The gallery's owner, Hollis Taggart, was introduced to the Hines collection by the art historian Peter Hastings Falk.



In 1982, a temporary art installation by Mr. Hines was part of the 25th anniversary celebration for the International Arrivals Building at Kennedy International Airport in New York. Vic DeLucia/The New York Times

Mr. Taggart said he was struck by how Mr. Hines used pastels on board, then wrapped the paintings with fabric, something he had not seen before.

“In today’s contemporary market, there is a big interest in alternative mediums, you see a lot of works that are made out of fabrics, ceramics, installations, wall hangings, things like that,” Mr. Taggart said. “What he was doing with fabric on paintings kind of fits what a lot of artists are doing today with using alternative mediums.”

Mr. Taggart said about 30 of Mr. Hines’s pieces, including paintings, drawings and a sculpture, will be exhibited next week. He said prices would start at \$5,000 to \$8,000 for works on paper, \$20,000 to \$35,000 for the wrapped paintings and \$55,000 for the sculpture.

The profit from the sales will go to Mr. Whipple, who said he planned to use most of the money to upgrade his warehouse in Waterbury, Conn., where he exhibits work by Mr. Hines and local artists.

The exhibition may look like the culmination of the Francis Hines project, but Mr. Whipple said it is just one more step forward in his mission to get recognition for the artist.



Mr. Hines with one of his installations, at the Port Authority Bus Terminal, in 1981. Keith Meyers/The New York Times

He is also working on a documentary about Mr. Hines and hopes to see the artist's work exhibited in a major New York City museum.

Mr. Whipple and Mr. Johnson conceded that Mr. Hines had been a man of the moment and did not share concerns about his legacy.

In an interview with The Times in 1979, Mr. Hines made clear that he was not precious about his work, after someone set fire to the East Village installation, eating away a swath of the gauzy fabric.

“Whatever happens, happens,” Mr. Hines said. “It’s almost part of the process. Your work becomes subject to all kinds of things, including weather and vandalism.”

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