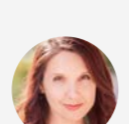


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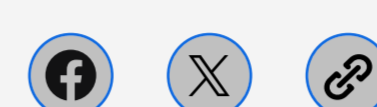


Fully Operational Fandom: An Incredibly Detailed Cardboard *Millennium Falcon*

Feast your eyes on one beautiful, recycled hunk of junk.



By Amy Ratcliffe
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When I see a pile of cardboard boxes, my first thought is usually about whether my cats would like to play with them. I know cardboard has functions beyond holding stuff and beyond serving as a bed for my choosy felines, but I'm not always patient or skilled enough to see beyond the surface. But artist Tom Richner? He has vision. When it came time for him to empty out cardboard boxes in his basement, he decided to repurpose the material rather than stacking it by the recycling bin and created a detailed replica of the *Millennium Falcon*.

Richner first encountered *Star Wars* when he was five years old. He saw *The Empire Strikes Back* in the theater and remembers running home from the bus one day after school to tell his mother *Return of the Jedi* was out and that they needed to go see it that weekend. A love for *Star Wars* clearly stayed with him. I talked to him about the work that went into building the *Falcon*, transporting it for photos, and how it came to be part of a display at the [Racine Art Museum](#).



StarWars.com: What inspired you to make a model of the *Millennium Falcon*?

Tom Richner: My father is an artist and we were always building things and painting pictures when I was growing up. I got interested in paper mache when I was young. One of the earliest things I made using cardboard and paper mache was a *Ghostbusters* proton pack for Halloween. But, I was always making *Star Wars* ships when I was little. If I saw two paper plates and a styrofoam cup, I thought, "There's the body and the cockpit of the *Millennium Falcon* right there," and two minutes later it was taped together and flying around our house. After going to school for animation at UCLA, working professionally as an artist on *The Simpsons*, and teaching animation for the last 10 years at the Columbus College of Art and Design (CCAD). While still freelancing, I've always continued to make things here and there for fun outside of work. I think it was a combination of the new movie coming out this year, my kids being the right age for it, and grabbing back a little of that comfort from my youth. And, my thinking was if I was going to make one, it needed to be big.

StarWars.com: How long did it take you to complete the model and what were some of the challenges you encountered while building it?

Tom Richner: It took me 140 total hours to build the cardboard *Millennium Falcon* over the course of many months. I would spend a few hours most nights after the kids were in bed putting it together. There weren't many hurdles. I looked at a lot of the photos for how they built the original models and used cardboard to create an inner support structure that was similar. Then, I worked on skinning it. The detail work on the surface took about half the time. The hardest part was dealing with the lack of sleep and being tired after staying up until 2-3:00 a.m. working on the model. I studied photos but didn't work to copy the original model exactly. It's a close interpretation of the original.

StarWars.com: I read that you transported it for photos -- does it fit inside a vehicle? How did you move it?

Tom Richner: When it was completed, I did shoot some photos on our green screen at CCAD. That was a fun experience. The model is about five-feet long, actually a little larger than the model made for the original *Star Wars* film. However, being that it's cardboard, it probably only weighs about 30-40 pounds, and a lot of that weight is the hot glue. It fits fairly well in the back of our mini-van (with all the seats out).



StarWars.com: Speaking of moving the model, your cardboard *Millennium Falcon* is currently on display. How did that come about?

Tom Richner: The cardboard *Millennium Falcon* is currently on display at the Racine Art Museum in Racine, Wisconsin, in their show "A Whole Other World: Sub-Culture Craft," running from May 24 - September 6. They are also displaying a 2/3 scale model paper mache R2-D2, as well as a smaller cardboard TIE Interceptor model of mine as well. I was contacted by Lena Vigna, the curator of exhibition at the Racine Art Museum, who had seen the model after it went viral on Reddit and Imgur in November 2014. The Racine Art Museum was putting together this show over the summer that featured some other amazing science fiction artwork. It was an honor to be asked to participate, and my brother Keith and I drove to Wisconsin to drop it off. It's currently hanging suspended from the ceiling in the museum, which is a great way for it to be displayed.



Amy Ratcliffe is a writer obsessed with all things Star Wars, Disney, and coffee. Follow her on Twitter at @amy_geek and keep up with all things geeky at her blog.

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