

Nina Katchadourian

# The Columbus Dispatch

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Published on: September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**Visual arts: Exhibit by Nina Katchadourian a compelling look at a family's perilous journey**



Installation image of "To Feel Something That Was Not of Our World," Pizzuti Collection of

Columbus Museum of Art *Luke Stettner*

When she was 7, Nina Katchadourian became fascinated with the true-adventure story, “Survive the Savage Sea,” written by Dougal Robertson and read aloud to her by her mother.

As an adult, Katchadourian, now 53, set about creating a multimedia art exhibit that captures the peril and persistence of the British family who, in 1972, survived the ordeal.

Dougal Robertson, his wife and four children set sail from Cornwall, England, on the schooner Lucette. Later in their journey, on the Pacific Ocean, a pod of orca whales capsized the boat, which sank and left the family stranded on a life raft that eventually wore out, leaving them on a small wooden dingy no larger than 10-by-5 feet.

When a ship passed without seeing them, Dougal Robertson determined that the family’s work was not to wait to be rescued, but to work to survive. After living on a diet of turtles, dorados (mahi mahi) and the occasional flying fish, they were finally rescued after 67 days by a Japanese tuna boat.

Katchadourian, an American artist who lives in both New York City and Berlin, captures the drama, danger and determination of the family in her exhibit “To Feel Something That Was Not of Our World,” on view through April 24 in the Pizzuti Collection of the Columbus Museum of Art, recently reopened in the Short North district.

The exhibit begins with a short video in which Katchadourian recounts the perilous story; her discussions with 66-year-old Douglas Robertson, one of the family's children; and her process of relating the tale in art.

After the video, viewers can traverse through several rooms and hallways, following a chronological depiction of the story and accompanied by an audio tour that can be downloaded on cellphones. Early on there is a striking image — a life-size black-and-white paper orca, representing the 20 that caused the boat to capsize. It's hung on one of the exhibit walls, all of which are painted a deep, royal blue.



Images of turtles and fish are presented throughout the rooms, along with facsimiles of artifacts from the adventure. One of the most beautiful installations is that of 11 turtles and flying fish

created of white wire and suspended from the ceiling. Toward the end of the exhibit are a series of watercolor paintings, many of them featuring the word “thwart,” whose double meaning conveys the term for a strut placed crossways in a boat or raft and the Robertson’s refusal to die at sea.

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The most dramatic section of the exhibit deals with the family’s rescue. As Dougal Robertson was helped aboard the ship, he pulled himself up with a rope. “To feel something that was not us, that was not of our world, that was so good,” he said.

Katchadourian emphasizes his statement and the title of her exhibit with a simple coiled rope placed on the floor.

Tyler Cann, curator of contemporary art for the museum and the Pizzuti Collection, had presented Katchadourian’s work in the 2018 exhibit “A Measure of Humanity” at the museum. He was eager to show “To Feel Something That Was Not of Our World” and said it is an appropriate exhibit to reopen the Pizzuti Collection after a long COVID-19 hiatus.

“The family’s story reminds me a little of what happened to most of us during COVID,” he said. “We were all trying to survive together on our own life rafts.”

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## At a glance

“To Feel Something That Was Not of Our World” by Nina Katchadourian continues through April 24 at the Pizzuti Collection of the Columbus Museum of Art, 632 N. Park St. Hours: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Fridays through Sundays. Admission: \$5, or proof of purchase of \$5 or more from Short North businesses. Visitors are required to wear masks. Call 614-221-6801 or visit [www.columbusmuseum.org](http://www.columbusmuseum.org).

<https://www.dispatch.com/story/entertainment/2021/09/19/to-feel-something-not-our-world-exhibit-survival/8318513002/>