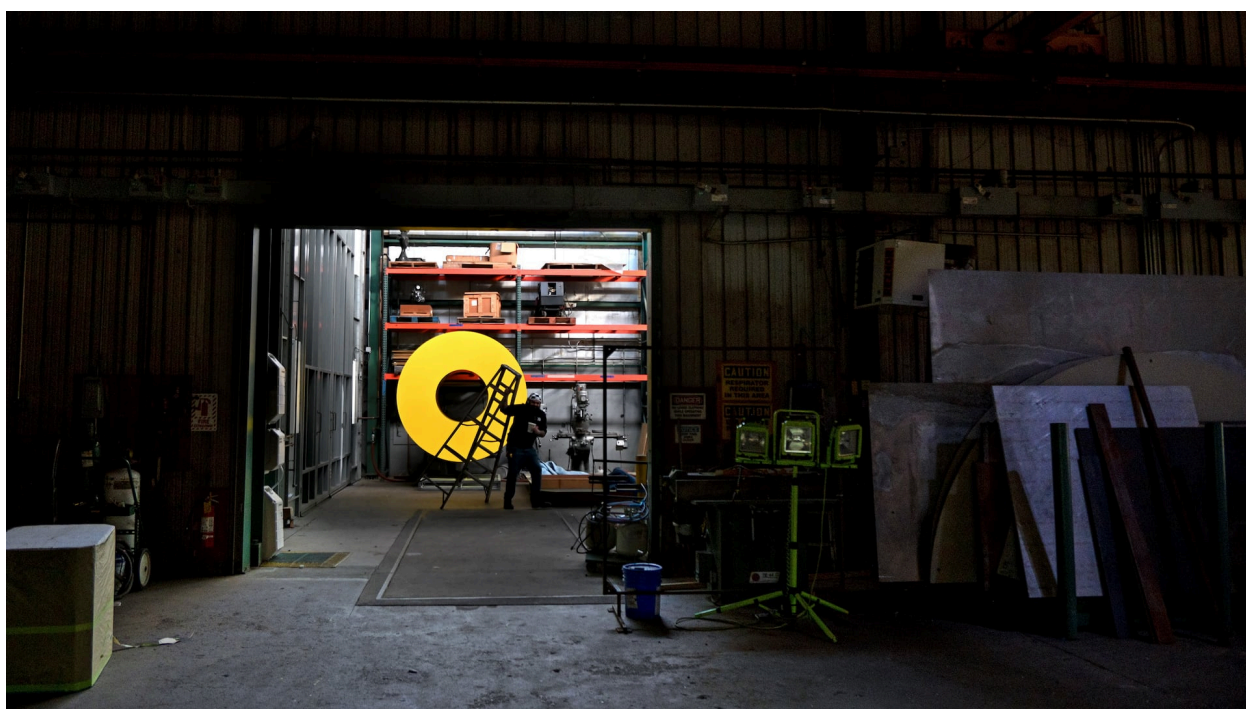


The Philadelphia Inquirer

The OY/YO statue is coming back

This week's Scene Through the Lens with Inquirer photographer Tom Gralish.



The renewed "O" and Austin Gabauer, paint and production assistant at the Johnson Atelier at Grounds for Sculpture in Hamilton Twp, N.J. Thursday, Oct. 23, 2025, ready for its return to Philadelphia.

Tom Gralish / Staff Photographer

by Tom Gralish

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I recently visited my favorite piece of Philly public art, at my favorite New Jersey sculpture garden.

No longer at its home outside the Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History on the corner of Fifth and Market Streets, the bright “Lamborghini yellow” sculpture that then-curator Josh Perelman called “an ongoing love letter to the city,” had gone away for some R & R — removal and refurbishment.



The "Y" waits to be refurbished at the Johnson Atelier in September.

Tom Gralish / Staff Photographer

Installed in 2022, the work by Brooklyn, N.Y.-based artist Deborah Kass quickly became one of our city’s most selfied spots — right up there with that bell just across Independence Mall.

It was only supposed to be here a year, but it stayed around (although the museum is hopeful, it’s still not officially permanent).



Students from Hillwood Middle School in Ft. Worth, Texas visit in 2022.

TOM GRALISH / Staff Photographer

After years on the busy corner (and all those field-tripping middle-schoolers climbing on it) the museum scheduled a removal in May of the eight foot tall Y and O letters for freshening up, planned to coincide with the continuing construction along Market Street through Old City.

Knowing my feelings for their sculpture, the folks at the museum invited me to photograph the refurbishment.

The letters did not require extensive work, and the aluminum was treated not unlike body work on a car: removing dents, priming, painting and leaving a durable finish.

At the Johnson Atelier, a facility established by Seward Johnson in 1974 to give artists greater involvement in the production of their work, I was not allowed to photograph from any angle that showed any other art works in the background. And there were plenty (sigh), like an eight-foot tall metal hand sitting on the floor, right across from the "Y" (I had to sign an NDA).



Looking over the fence from a public area at Grounds for Sculpture in 2019. A collection of trompe-l'œil painted sculptures by Seward Johnson in the yard at the adjacent Johnson Atelier.

Tom Gralish / Staff Photographer

Adding to the lack of visual variety, the letters went into the painting booth one at a time, so I couldn't make a picture of them in the same frame. And I could only see the workers in the booth from outside - through a couple of windows. But that is exactly the kind of photographic challenge I most enjoy.



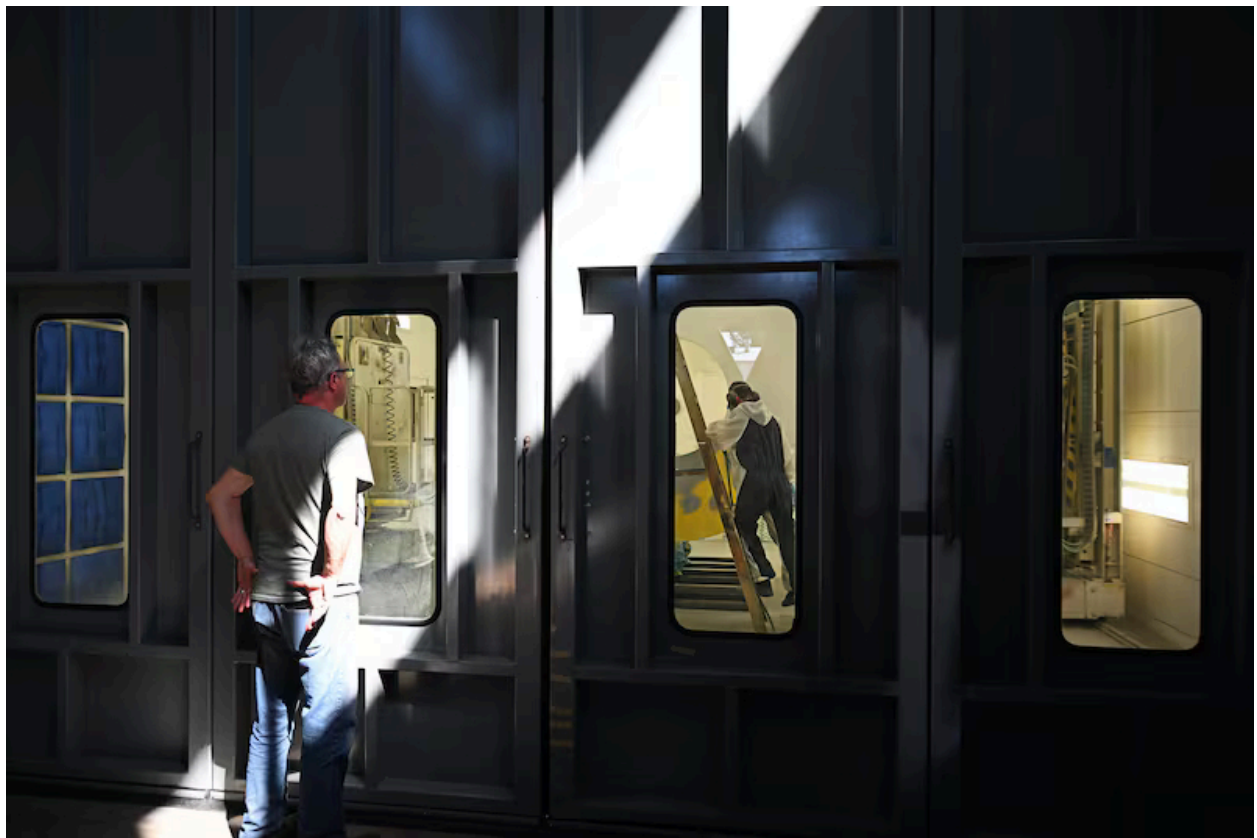
Nicolas Valenza applies primer to the “O” letter in a painting booth at the Johnson Atelier in September.
Tom Gralish / Staff Photographer

Now, after a few months the two giant letters are both as good as new and are scheduled to be reinstalled this Saturday.

Weitzman president and CEO Dan Tadmor, looking forward to its return to their corner heading into the nation’s 250th says, “Deborah Kass’s OY/YO celebrates the spirit of a city that’s always spoken in its own voice: bold, funny, and full of heart.”

find this article : <https://www.inquirer.com/photo/a/oy-yo-statue-jewish-museum-back-20251025.html>

archive.org : <https://archive.ph/BH4Ou>



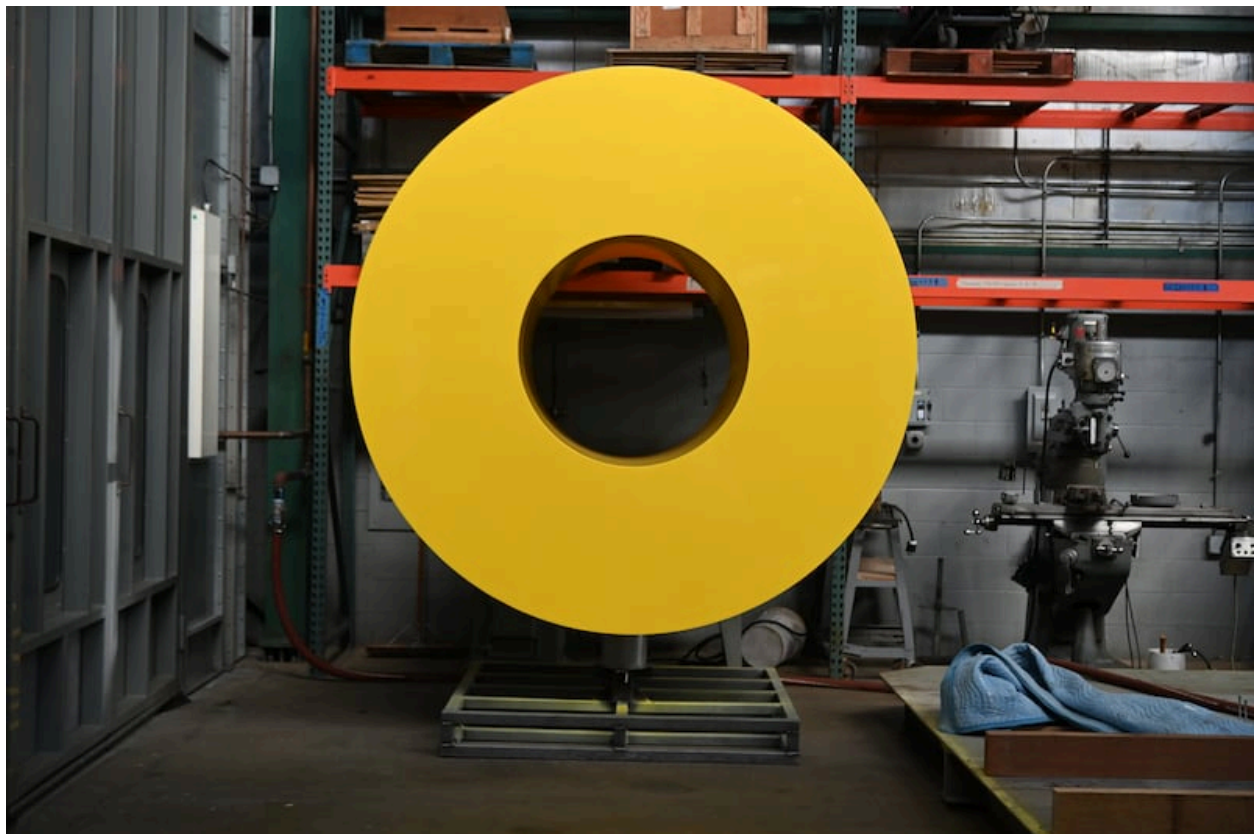
Production Manager Andreas Scholtz (left) watched Valenza from outside the painting booth.
Tom Gralish / Staff Photographer



Tom Gralish / Staff Photographer



Primed and ready for painting.
Tom Gralish / Staff Photographer



The finished "O" Thursday, Oct. 23, 2025, as it awaits the return to Philadelphia
Tom Gralish / Staff Photographer



The finished “Y” remains inside the painting booth Thursday, Oct. 23, 2025, until it is trucked with the “O” back to the Weitman National Museum of American Jewish History at the corner of Fifth and Market Streets on Nov. 1.

Tom Gralish / Staff Photographer