

Leonora Curtin Wetland hosts ephemeral sculpture exhibit

Natural wonders >
“Wilderness Acts 2016” promotes awareness of natural world

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Strolling through the 35-acre Leonora Curtin Wetland Preserve when the cottonwoods are turning golden and fall is in the air is a pleasure in and of itself. But the preserve holds a special draw this October as it hosts its second biennial, “Wilderness Acts 2016.”

The show is curated by Axle Contemporary, whose co-founders Jerry Wellman and Matthew Chase-Daniel proposed celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act in 2014 with an exhibit at the wetlands.

“This is one of my favorite places in the area. I used to take my daughter here all the time when she was little. And a lot of people didn’t really know this place,” Wellman said. “Although it’s not exactly wilderness, it’s pretty wild, and the wetlands are a pretty important place to preserve. So it just kind of dovetailed into this notion, and we wanted to invite artists to experience it and to re-express it artistically.”

“We really enjoy Axle doing projects with other organizations,” Chase-Daniel said. “We’re always happy to mix it up and do art projects, especially with non-arts organizations.”

The first “Wilderness Acts” was very successful.

“We loved it so much and people enjoyed it so much, they came back to us and said, let’s make this a biennial. And we’re like, we love that,” said Santa Fe Botanical Gardens Chief Executive Officer Clayton Bass. The preserve is a branch of the Botanical Gardens.

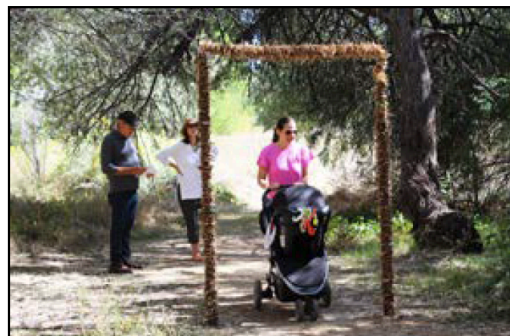
The show’s focus is exploring the relationship between art and nature, creating awareness of our local natural resources and promoting wetland and ecological conservation. Several of the 10 artists who created ephemeral sculptures for the exhibit were on hand to talk about their work at Saturday’s opening.

Chase-Daniel is also one of the artists. His *Passage/Paysage* is a doorway framing the main path into the wetlands, constructed of dry cottonwood leave strung together.

“One thing that inspired me to do that piece was when we did



Wilderness Acts 2016 opened at the Leonora Curtin Wetland Preserve this weekend. The show will run every weekend through the rest of October. Visitors write Love Letters to a Tree at Chrissie Orr and Joel Glanzberg’s interactive piece to the sounds of a harp. ARIN MCKENNA/Monitor



Visitors walk through “Passage/Paysage” by Matthew Chase-Daniel Saturday. ARIN MCKENNA/Monitor

the show two years ago, I found that a lot of people were walking through the nature preserve and were interacting with the walk and the place in a different way, because they were looking for pieces of art. So they were looking at nature and trying to discern where the pieces of art were,” Chase-Daniel said. “So they ended up looking at nature in a different way, and looking at the shape that a tree was grow-

ing and thinking, is that a sculpture or did that just come naturally?”

The piece is meant to function as both doorway and frame.

“So it’s framing a landscape in the way you would frame a picture, but the frame is made of the landscape,” Chase-Daniel said. “So it’s made of leaves that are from the trees near there.”

The first exhibit visitors encounter is *Impact* by

Joshua Willis, an 8-foot by 12-foot relief in the shape of a human footprint.

When the idea came to Willis two years ago, he pictured Bigfoot walking through the forest, leaving footprints. His next thought was, what if you blew up the scale?

“And in my mind it talks about human impact, the human footprint,” Willis said.

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The footprint is the size of a car.

"I think vehicles and infrastructure for vehicles is probably one of the biggest signs of our impact on this planet," Willis said. "So I wanted it to take the same place as a car."

Willis hopes the Botanical Gardens will keep the footprint in place after the exhibit ends so it can become a sunken garden, collecting rainfall to nourish native plants. Willis has scattered juniper berries across the entire footprint to help things out.

"And that's the most beautiful conclusion to this whole project, in my mind, because, human impact – and look how intense this is – but as time goes on it's inhabited," Willis said.

"Shelter (Disassembled)" by Michelle Goodman is a pup tent shaped structure constructed of branches partially filled in with vegetation.

"It's about taking refuge in nature and the dire time we live in," Goodman said, referring to such things as severe weather events, terrorist violence, extinction of plants and animals and unrest in our society.

Shelter is framed by arching branches of an old cottonwood. The minute Goodman saw the spot she knew that was where she wanted to construct her exhibit. She later learned the area is called Tree Lodge.

Chrissie Orr and Joel Glanzberg's "Love Letters to a Tree" is an interactive piece. Orr herself fell



Visitors check out the exhibit called "Shelter (Disassembled)" by Michelle Goodman Saturday. ARIN MCKENNA/Monitor

If You Go

When: Both exhibits of "Wilderness Acts 2016" run through Oct. 30. The preserve is open 9 a.m.–3 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays.

Cost: Admission is free, but donations are encouraged. On the third Saturday of every month the preserve opens at 7:30 a.m., with an early entrance fee of \$5.

Where: Leonora Curtin Wetland Preserve is located at 27283 I-25 West Frontage Road in La Cienega. From NM 599, turn south onto West Frontage Road heading toward the Downs at Santa Fe Race Track. The parking lot entrance is two miles south of the Downs.

Online: santafebotanicalgarden.org/visit-us/leonora-curtin-wetland-preserve or call 471-9103.

in love with the tree, and she and Glanzberg wrote love letters to it.

"I'm inviting people to sit with the tree then write a love letter to it then roll it up and place it in the bark," Orr said.

Even though the harpist serenading visitors on Saturday will be absent in coming weeks, the artists' description for the brochure urges visitors to "take time with this tree, sit with it, close your eyes, open your heart and feel into a sacred love for this magnificent being."

Christie Green's "Ed-

ible Invasives" is another interactive piece, which invites visitors to taste Russian Olive tea or squirrel jerky. Her piece raises questions about what is beneficial and what is a nuisance, whether that be invasive species or coyotes and squirrels.

"I Wear the Earth" by Sondra Goodwin is a garment woven from the sedge of the meadow in which it stands, where it appears to be growing out of the earth. Goodwin notes that "everything we use, consume and wear comes from

the earth, be it cotton or polyester. In the process of taking what we need we take more than we give. We are wearing out our earthly garden."

"Disjoint" by Chris Collins uses three fallen trees from the preserve to explore resource consumption and colonial exploitation and "the ecosystem which slowly regenerates from the erosion of historical disruption."

Other exhibits include "Nido del Otoño (Autumn Nest)" by Nicasio Romero, a large nest woven of willow and Grass

book *i-ix* (anitya series) by Anne Cooper. Anitya means 'impermanence' in Sanskrit, and the nine grass books constructed of unfired clay and paper made of native grasses will dissolve back into the earth over time, leaving only a red stain.

To fully appreciate Erika Wanenmacher's "What Time Travel Feels Like, Sometimes #1," visitors will have to get to the Axle Contemporary Mobile Gallery, which hosts a joint exhibit of "Wilderness Acts 2016." Artists were asked to create pieces related to the preserve exhibits for the mobile gallery, and Wanenmacher's stands out.

During the month of September, Wanenmacher moved her life-sized figure made of cottonwood twigs around the preserve and captured images of wildlife interacting with the figure using a motion-activated digital trail camera. The photos on display at the opening showed a raccoon investigating the sculpture. The figure will continue her journey around the Preserve in October.

Go to axleart.com to find where the gallery will be parked and for more information on the exhibit.

"We're parking five or six days out of the week, so we could be parked about anywhere," Chase-Daniel said.

The Santa Fe Botanical Gardens opens a new section of the garden *Ojos y Manos: Eyes and Hands* on Oct. 22. Follow the *Los Alamos Monitor* for more on that story.