
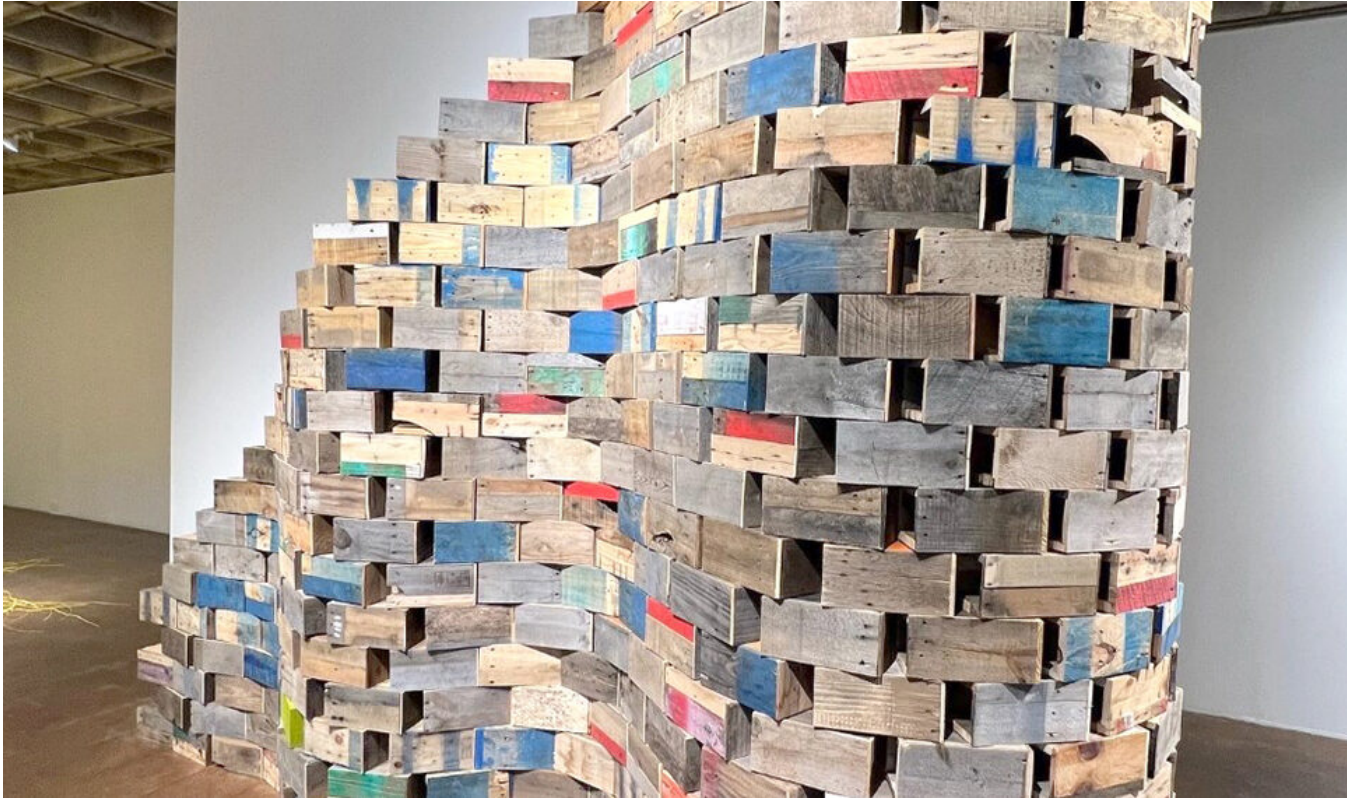


From: Timothy Murdoch timu23@yahoo.com 
Subject: City launches interactive art program at parks – San Diego Downtown News
Date: May 7, 2022 at 12:30 PM
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<https://sandiegodowntownnews.com/city-launches-interactive-art-program-at-parks/>

City launches interactive art program at parks



By KENDRA SITTON

A two-year-long effort from local artists to create temporary art at local parks officially launches in May. Kick-off weekend for the brand-new program funded by an anonymous family bequest endowment and the city's Public Art Fund is on May 21. Events and pop-up art installations will continue through Nov.20.

The 18 artists who applied and were accepted for the project are divided evenly between each of the nine city council districts. Inside those districts, the artists had a \$15,000 budget to create temporary art installations that encourage the public to interact with each other and the meaningful art. The project encourages people to go to public parks and also makes art more accessible to them as it comes to many different neighborhoods rather than being limited to galleries and museums.

At Kensington Park, Trevor Amery has installed his art piece and is excited that kids are already using it as an extension of the playground. Located between the small Kensington library and large playground, he built a 10-foot diameter platform that is two feet off the ground with a curving surface that looks like the undulating ocean. He then carved kelp and other plants into the surface to advance his message of preserving the kelp forest amid climate change.





Tim Murdoch's moving wall of shipping pallets will appear at the opening and closing ceremonies of Park Social. (Photo courtesy Tim Murdoch)

"It's just kind of a 24/7 jungle gym of kids climbing all over it, which is awesome. I love that," he said. Amery explained that lawsuits have made playgrounds sterile so he is excited the children are relating to each other outside of metal and plastic materials.

Before installing the platform, he had to present his idea to a panel of city council members and community members. Their focus was on the "nuts and bolts" of the installation to ensure it was safe for kids. Based on

that conversation, Amery chose a lighter hard wood so it would not get too hot under the sun and sanded and sealed the wood carefully to prevent splinters.

The platform functions as a stage—letting people create their own art. He is also hosting rubbing workshops on the first and third Saturdays for three months to teach the public how to etch the kelp carvings to build drawings. He is documenting the drawings people create and hopes to hold an exhibition of the community-created art in the library at the end of the project. He is passionate about preserving kelp forests which is part of the message of the work.

"[Kelp forests] are a keystone species, providing the basis for their underwater ecosystem. For me this is a lot like the parks and the role they played during the pandemic. They create safe spaces for people to come together, to get that social nourishment that was so greatly lacking during isolation," Amery said.

The other artist working inside City Council District 3 is Tim Murdoch. His inclusion in the project was serendipitous as he had started working on an art piece for the Port of San Diego that officials decided against. He had already begun building boxes from shipping pallets when the city's call went out for local artists.

"It was perfect because I knew exactly what I wanted to do. I sort of changed certain aspects of the project to suit the parks but essentially, I had already made the project," Murdoch said.

At the beginning of the pandemic, he became obsessed with building the boxes to eventually create a moving sculpture. He started by using every pallet available but eventually became very choosy, only using pallets that were colorful or had interesting patterns of wear and tear.

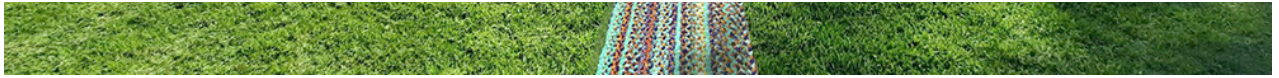
He will present the moving sculpture at the opening ceremony for Park Social at Fault line Park. With help from other artists in the initiative who can salsa dance, dancers will move the boxes in a wall that follows the line of the fault from the top of the park to the bottom. He hopes the audience will participate in moving the boxes as well. He will do a similar event at North Park Community Park and at the end of Park Social will do the same at Balboa Park during a closing ceremony.

He chose shipping pallets because they cross borders all the time.

"The project itself is really about the way that we create these borders and how they change all the time," Murdoch said. "We can unbuild and build these walls all the time and we still can come together as a community."

He appreciated working on a temporary art project because there was less political and bureaucratic systems to navigate.





"Collective Memory" is a textile art installation that invites visitors to sit on the blankets outside or inside the dome to process collective memories brought on by the pandemic. It was created by Sheena Rae Dowling and Yvette Roman. (Photo courtesy City of San Diego)

"I like temporary work a lot because I think it's good for the community to see loads of different ideas presented," he said.

The thought-provoking art will be at a total of 28 parks over the next six months. The city is using the project as a way to support local artists and revive the arts industry after the economic impacts of the pandemic.

The city has [over] the last few years really pivoted a lot to focus on elevating local artists and creating opportunities for them," Amery said.

This initiative is a first step in a larger plan to activate the city's park system through cultural engagement and support the arts.