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ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

23 San Diego artists will transform the city’s parks with new public artworks



A rendering of Sheena Rae Dowling and Yvette Roman's Memory Dome, "Collective Memory," which will be staged in San Diego's San Ysidro Community Park. Visitors are invited to sit inside the structure to process pandemic experiences and emotions. (Sheena Rae Dowling and Yvette Roman)

BY DEBORAH VANKIN | STAFF WRITER

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San Diego’s park system will serve as a sweeping canvas for local artists starting in May. The city has announced a public arts collaboration, Park Social, in which 23 local artists have been commissioned to create 18 projects that use local landscapes as backdrops for site-specific, interactive works. The artists will transform open spaces in 28 parks, including canyons, urban and residential neighborhood parks, large hiking destinations and shoreline-adjacent spaces.

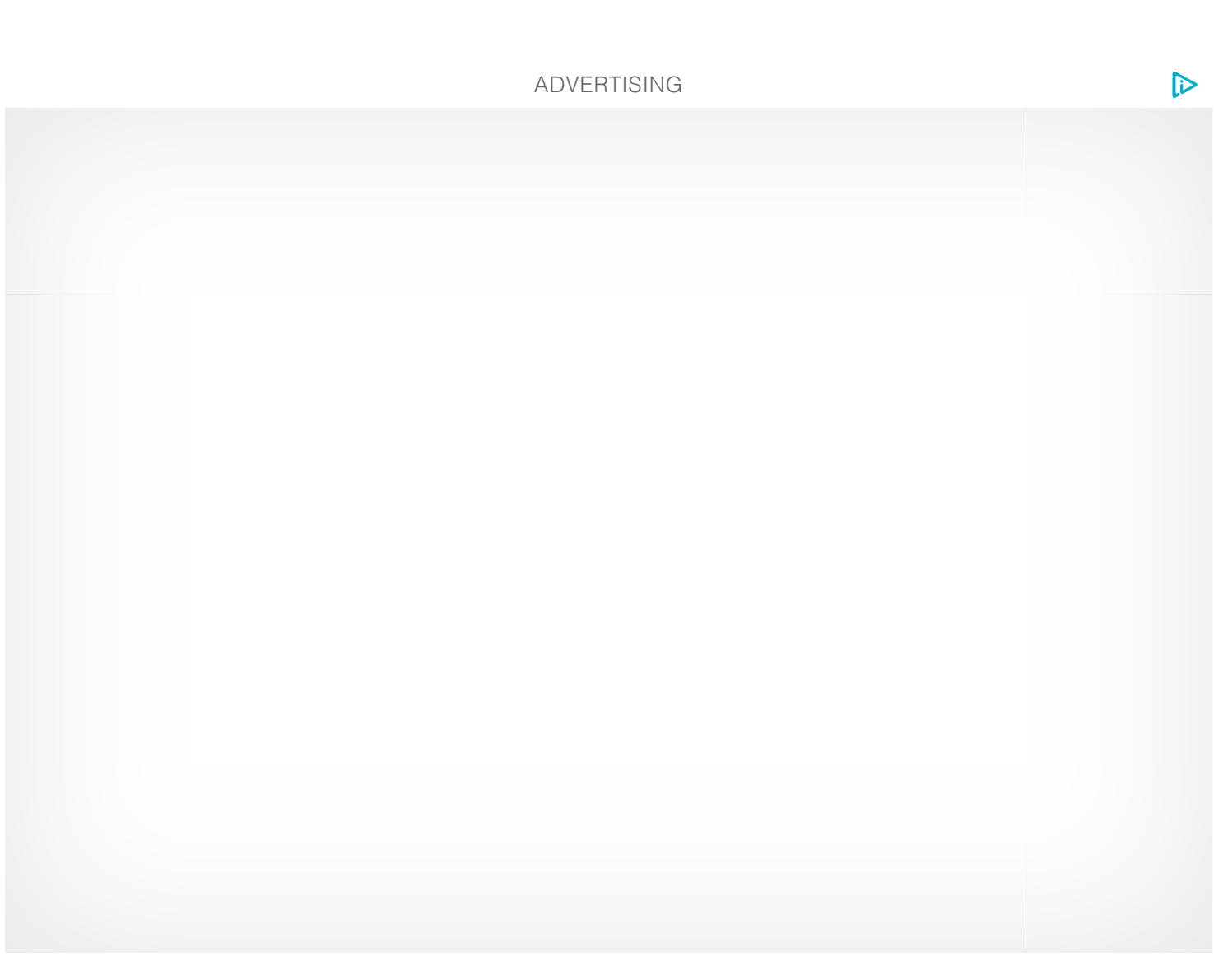
Each artist or art collective was given \$15,000 to create new work. The art — mostly installation-based works and performances — will be on view at different parks throughout the city from May 21 to Nov. 20. All of it will be free to the public.

The overall goal of Park Social is to reconnect members of the public with one another as well as with the city and its natural spaces after years of pandemic isolation, said Christine Jones, chief of civic arts strategies for San Diego.

“This is about bringing people together and celebrating art and parks,” she said. “Reconnecting and celebrating.”

The artists spent months researching San Diego’s 42,000 acres of [park space](#) and developing their projects. Public space is a key focus.

“There’s an exploration of social space,” Jones said, “and some explore social cohesion, belonging, collective expression.”



Sheena Rae Dowling and [Yvette Roman](#) created a Memory Dome for San Ysidro Community Park. Visitors will be encouraged to sit inside the structure, made of fabric remnants, or lie on blankets around it, to process experiences and emotions that may have built up during the pandemic. The work, called “Collective Memory,” includes community members’ own memories, written on suspended strips of fabric inside the structure, as well as an Instagram archive.



A detail rendering of Trevor Amery's "Barely Touching," a sculptural installation. The work invites visitors to Kensington Park to make paper rubbings on its surfaces. (Trevor Amery)

Some artists address change and healing. Trevor Amery created an interactive sculptural installation, “Barely Touching,” that’s inspired by the ocean as well as “geologic change.” The work, in Kensington Park, includes a round, central sculpture featuring waves and aquatic plant shapes on a flat surface; it’s surrounded by wood “rocks” that have plant formations carved into them. Visitors are invited to make rubbings, with paper, on their surfaces.

“For me, it’s a lot about elements of change — erosion, but also ecosystems and how kelp is a keystone species for forming the basis of an underwater ecosystem,” Amery said. “That’s a metaphor for how the parks, [during the pandemic](#), were a refuge where people could get social nourishment.”

The projects also speak to issues such as “cultural boundaries, biases and identities,” Jones said.

[Mario Torero](#) and Sarah Bella Mondragon’s “Toltec Totems” — pop-up sculptural installations that will be on view in four locations in Balboa Park over two days — was inspired by the history of the Chicano Arts Movement in San Diego, which led to the founding of the city’s [Chicano Park](#) and Centro Cultural de la Raza in Balboa Park.

Sculptor Tim Murdoch’s “Walking the Wall,” in the Fault Line Park, is a participatory performance in which dancers — artist collaborators of Murdoch’s — will reconfigure wooden boxes made from shipping palettes, creating a moving wall or morphing border. Architect characters in the piece will carry backpack-like speakers blasting salsa music. The work speaks to “the ownership of space through collaboration,” he said.

“Ever-changing borders and walls,” Murdoch said. “It’s a political topic, but I’m trying not to be too political or didactic. I want it to be a celebration, an ever-evolving thing. Walls are built, walls move, countries change — mutable boundaries.”

Park Social, he added, “is a great project from the city. It’s bringing the idea of community forth in an artistic way. And it’s all the communities because we’re using the city’s parks.”

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