

Earth Art Lab kicks off at Carnes Park

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Braided grass, willow mushrooms and a grapevine arch are among the natural sculptures featured in a temporary exhibit at Dorothy Carnes County Park.

Despite the heat, nearly 50 people showed up at the park west of Fort Atkinson Wednesday evening for the formal opening of the Earth Art Lab temporary exhibit.

Earth Art Lab is a cross between nature and creativity that invites viewers to think differently about their experiences at the park. It features six sculptures by 10 artists woven into the natural landscape along the three-quarter-mile “art loop” trail. All art pieces are made from natural materials gathered locally and installed on site in such a way that they will be affected by the elements throughout the course of their exhibit.

“Dorothy Carnes Park is personally one of my favorite parks,” Anne Drehfal, the primary coordinator of the Earth Art Lab, said during the kickoff gathering. “I feel like it’s a total gem in Jefferson County. There were a few different, but similar, installations — one up in northern Wisconsin, the Raven Trail — and some of the art pieces there were left in place for up to seven years, so that was really cool to visit it over the course of time and see how the pieces changed.

“I really wanted this to be up for a few months so people can see that,” she continued. “Especially with the fall colors, I think that the pieces will all look different over the course of time and how the weather interacts with them. So those other exhibits were, ‘oh, I really enjoy going to that. I would love one to be closer to home so I and Jefferson County could interact with it a little more frequently.’”



ART IN THE PARK

ART IN THE PARK — The Earth Art Lab formally opened on Wednesday in Dorothy Carnes County Park west of Fort Atkinson. Consisting of six sculptures by 10 artists, the exhibit will run through Oct. 31. Found on the 3/4-mile trail in Dorothy Carnes County Park-West, the sculptures all are made from natural materials that will cause no damage to existing nature. Sponsors of the temporary exhibit include the Jefferson County Parks Department, Fort Arts Council, Friends of Rose Lake and Festival Foods, along with many individual donors. For more photos, [click here](#). — Daily Union photos by Alexa Zoellner.

Drehfal's efforts to bring her idea to life began in December when she first presented the idea to the Jefferson County Parks Department and county board of supervisors' Parks Committee.

"Anne came to our Parks Committee to pitch her project and what she wanted to do; she came back several times and the Parks Committee approved it, issued her the permit," Kevin Wiesmann, Jefferson County Parks Department operations supervisor, said. "They let her use the shelter out here for this event. So the Parks Committee and our administration really supported it."

He said the Parks Department helped cut down some trees and Wiesmann walked the site and approved where everything was going to go.

"We gave them some extra materials from our supplies for them to use, kiosk materials and stuff like that," he said.

Once Drehfal's project was approved, artists were sought.

"I put a call out to artists, basically through social media and then through my own network of friends and family and suggested that artists present their ideas," Drehfal explained. "That was about a month-long period. They were asked to send sketches of their ideas.

"Obviously, it's hard to know exactly what something will look like until it's fully created, but they could provide a materials list and their general ideas. Each of those ideas was presented to the Parks Department and then we went forward with installing them."

Ultimately, 10 artists with six sculptures were chosen for the exhibit. The pieces include "Unexpected Archway" by Sally Koehler, Mary Wallace, Karen Gomez and Linda Tump; "Through the Trees" by Teresa Bellrichard; "Opuntia" and "Still Standing" by Jeanne Debbink; "13-Lined Ground Squirrel of Grass" by Maddie Van Cleve and Kate Sprecher; "Willow Birdcages" by Drehfal; and "Art Imitating Nature" by Bob Swann.

Each group provided a statement about its piece for a brochure.

Koehler, Wallace, Gomez and Tump described theirs as "a playful interaction with an arching oak covered with a vine, creating a natural canopy. By tying and weaving grapevine, pear tree cuttings and milkweed stems, we followed the curve of the arch to create 'windows' leading the eye to the landscape beyond. Additionally, we added unexpected elements of stones, wasp nests, wool and feathers."

Bellrichard said, "one of my favorite things about nature is seeing sunlight through leaves in the summer. I absolutely love the beauty and peace that comes through. I find few things more grounding in nature. I wanted to capture that feeling with this project and show the patterns that are woven by the trees."

Debbink wrote, “My pieces are inspired by the simple, playful petroglyphs of the southwest and the cacti that grow there. It’s interesting to me that humans have left their marks in sacred places. Blackened, like a burned out trunk of a tree struck by lightning, I finished my work by charring them.”

Van Cleve and Sprecher noted, “A thirteen-lined ground squirrel is a rodent native to Wisconsin, whose original habitat is prairie. We hope this oversized braided image will remind park users that the prairies, once the dominant landscape in southern Wisconsin, harbor a great deal of biodiversity, even if it is sometimes difficult to see.”

Drehfal wrote, “The park is home to many songbirds and I hope that they will find comfort in these hanging pieces from time to time, allowing the visitors to question our relationship to the wildlife we share the space with, as we draw lines between nature and our world of technology and domestication.

Swann notices that “sometimes it has to be large to be noticed! The mushroom caps were shaped from dead weeping willow trunks and the stems were formed from dead wood.

“Mushrooms in nature fall into three categories: saprophytic — aiding in the decomposition of organic material; parasitic — attacking living organisms; symbiotic — providing essential nutrient transfers to plant roots.”

Overall, the opening event went great, Drehfal said.

“It was wonderful. I’m really appreciative of everybody showing up,” she said. “The weather was a little warm, but it’s nice and breezy and it’s a beautiful evening. (It was) definitely a success. It was great to see and I look forward to people continuing to interact with it, too.”

“I think the artists did an amazing job of creating a diverse array of art displays in the park,” Wiesmann said. “I think people are really going to appreciate it once they come and see it and walk through and hopefully it’ll bring new people into the park. They really did an amazing job overall.”

In addition to the Parks Department, sponsors include the Fort Arts Council, Friends of Rose Lake, Festival Foods and individual donors.

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