

California artist brings beauty to symbol of border at Chalk the Block 2014

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Few would think of the word "beautiful" when thinking of a chain link fence.

But California artist Ioana Urma plans to create that illusion with her three-dimensional chain-link installation.

"El Paso is a border town so it makes sense that I'm using chain link fence because a fence is a border. So it's taking this border and making it into a zone of celebration, transforming it into something beautiful and instead of something that keeps you out," she said.

Urma, an architect turned artist, is creating the installation with beautiful silky fabrics as part of the GECU Presents the 7th Annual Chalk the Block Public Arts Festival today through Sunday.

REPORTER



María Cortés González

Today is considered the preview night with temporary art installations, a community chalk area and showcase artists like Urma.

Chris Espinoza, production and marketing coordinator for the city's Museums & Cultural Affairs Department, said the event always offers something new because they feature different national artists.

"Every year it's a little bit different, we have art installations that come from all over the country sometimes the world," he said.

Chalk the Block, which features both amateur and professional artists, attracts anywhere from 35,000 to 38,000 people over three days.

Urma, who generally works in three-dimensional projects, said she's all about creating art for public spaces.

"I just think more people will see it. A lot of people don't usually go to museums to see art," she said.

The chain link creation, called "Porous Prism" will consist of 700 linear feet of chain link fence in numerous panels. Urma will enhance the fencing by draping them with colorful fabric.

"The beautiful fabrics represent the colors and flowers in the desert — yellows, orange, hot pink, magenta and purple," she said.

Urma said the installation is also meant to be interactive. People will be able to walk into the installation.

"It's what I've been doing recently in my installations. It's very different from art that you just look at. You're interacting with it because you have to figure your way out



Artist Ioana Urma uses a steamer to smooth fabric she placed on chain link fencing Thursday at Cleveland Square. Urma is installing her artwork

of the maze."

She added, "it's interesting to make projects out of every day things and to see them in a different way."

Aside from art installations and the live performances, the event on Saturday and Sunday will feature live chalk art competitions, an interactive public chalk area, a Jungle Jaks kids' zone, a food truck court with 25 vendors and 41 diverse art vendors.

The Odd-Lab performance troupe, known for its fire showsarts, will have several different performances throughout the weekend. Performances Saturday will include stilt walkers at noon, 3 and 8 p.m., the Shadow Box

Theatre at 7:45 p.m. and the Fire Show, "Find the Light" at 9 p.m.

Additionally organizers have included several pop-up galleries in vacant Downtown storefronts. The pop-ups are curated exhibitions placed in vacant storefronts, gallery space, and under utilized Downtown venues.

Xochitl Rodriguez, a trans disciplinary artist, will feature her conceptual work, "The Shell" in a pop-up gallery at 227 N. Mesa.

"Chalk the Block is a good opportunity to show a different way of making art that isn't within the traditional landscape they are used to," she said.

"The Shell" will be an 18-minute performance piece featuring nine heroines of the 21st century claiming their super powers and taking ownership of them, Rodriguez said. "It's highly improvisational but we have a framework we work out of," she said.

El Pasoan Jennifer Rivas said she always looks forward to Chalk the Block because it's packed with activities.

"It's always a great time for family and friends to get together. There is a ton of different things going on from the chalk to the pop-up galleries. I like to see the chalk artists when they get started and then later to see the finished product," she said.

This year, Rivas is extra pumped as she will be on the other end of the chalk. She is among the El Paso artists who will be drawing her own 10-by-5 foot space in front of the convention center.

"I'm really excited. I've always wanted to try it and hadn't done it until this year," she said.

Rivas, who dabbles in painting and makes her own metal jewelry, said she will be designing an abstract peacock with a lot of detail.

"It's going to be a more abstract version than realistic with watercolors and different chalks," she said. "I'm nervous because I've never done a large scale drawing but I have a lot great people coming to help me."

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