

ARBOREAL ARTISTRY

KiMo exhibit hopes to spur dialogue about the changing bosque ecosystem

BY OLLIE REED JR.
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Kent Swanson sees the cottonwood river forest that runs through Albuquerque with different eyes.

As manager of the city's Open Space Visitor Center, 6500 Coors NW, he pierces the bosque with the eyes of the natural resources planner, searching for sections where trees need to be planted, spying out areas threatened by invasive species.

As an Albuquerque native and South Valley resident who has spent many years exploring, hiking in and biking through the bosque, he looks at it with an affection reserved for things that are special and irreplaceable.

And as an artist, he focuses on light, shadows, seasons and place.

"Interpreting (the bosque) as an artist, looking at things to make art, is about being present in a place for an extended period of time, paying attention to where you are," said Swanson, 46. "It is kind of a meditative experience."

Tree of Life

Swanson and fellow artists Jennifer Pretzeus and Joshua Willis created the 20 or so works that make up "Arbol de La Vida (Tree of Life)," an exhibit, inspired by the Rio Grande bosque, that opens this week at the KiMo Theatre Gallery, 423 Central NW.

There's an opening reception from 5 to 8 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 23, at the KiMo. The exhibit will be on view through April 5 by appointment.

"I had kind of been, just on my own, working on prints and artwork that related to trees, and in particular the cottonwood bosque," Swanson said. "Then I approached Jennifer and Joshua, artists interested in similar, nature-related themes. The work on this show has been in progress about a year."

He said the exhibit is intended to spur dialogue about the changing bosque ecosystem. Cottonwoods, which have a life span of 70 to 100 years, regenerate through seeding provided by natural flooding. But Swanson said that because of dams and channels created along the Rio Grande to control flooding, this hasn't happened since the 1940s.

"A lot of the trees have started to die off because the river has changed so much," he said. "It no longer has a natural flood cycle. We wanted to offer a way



COURTESY OF JENNIFER PRETZEUS

"Roots," by Jennifer Pretzeus, is part of the exhibit "Arbol de La Vida."

to visually explore that landscape and bring attention to the bosque's fragility."

Swanson said Albuquerque's Open Space Division and the Open Space Alliance, a nonprofit group of volunteers, are engaged in reforestation efforts to preserve the bosque.

"Open Space works with school groups and adult volunteers to plant 300 native shrubs and more than a thousand trees, half of them cottonwoods, a year," he said. "Another project is stream bank lowering that helps with the (natural) reseeding process."

Swanson said he hopes "Arbol de La Vida" encourages people to spend time in the bosque, learn to appreciate it and discover ways to support restoration, either by volunteering or contributing to groups involved in those efforts.

Patterns and textures

Swanson, Pretzeus and Willis met with each other during the course of the project to share experiences and look for common threads.

"We were looking at the time scale of the forest, the length of time the bosque has been around and how it is beginning to change," Swanson said. "Joshua wanted to focus on the river. Jennifer was looking at tree rings, larger trees that had reached maturity and been cut down, chopped down and left in place to provide habitat or removed to make sure they are not a fire hazard."

"Jennifer spent a lot of time in the area close to Montaña (Road), near the Bosque



Kent Swanson



COURTESY OF KENT SWANSON

Kent Swanson's "Scroll 1," a woodblock print and mixed media on mulberry paper, is one of the works in "Arbol de La Vida (Tree of Life)," an exhibit, inspired by the Rio Grande bosque, that opens this week at the KiMo Theatre Gallery.



COURTESY OF JOSHUA WILLIS

"Canopy" is the title of this cotton and denim work by artist Joshua Willis.

School. I explored the South Valley and the area between Montaña and Paseo del Norte. Joshua rides his mountain bike along the whole (bosque) stretch, from Rio Bravo to Paseo."

Pretzeus worked in encaustics, hot wax into which colored pigments are mixed. For this project, she added tree resin and charcoal and ash from bosque fires. Willis used fabrics to create his pieces for the exhibit.

Swanson's exhibit pieces are woodblock print and mixed media on hand-dyed scrolls of paper. Viewing some of his images may make you feel as if you are looking up through looming bosque bowers just as the sun climbs over the Sandia Mountains.

"I like to look at patterns of branches, textures and the bark," he said. "I'm still making them recognizable as tree forms, but capturing the essence of what it would be like to walk through the bosque observing patterns on macro and micro scale."

Survive and thrive

Swanson graduated from Highland High and studied printmaking, book arts and papermaking on the way to a fine arts degree at Occidental

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Opening reception for "Arbol de La Vida (Tree of Life)," an art exhibit inspired by the Rio Grande Valley's cottonwood riverside forest and featuring works by Jennifer Pretzeus, Kent Swanson and Joshua Willis

WHEN: 5-8 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 23. Exhibit on view through April 5 by appointment. Call Augustine Romero at 764-1743

WHERE: KiMo Theatre Gallery, 423 Central NW

HOW MUCH: Opening reception and exhibit are free

College in Los Angeles. He earned a master's in planning at the University of New Mexico and served two years with the Peace Corps in Honduras, working in municipal development. He has been with Albuquerque Open Space for 13 years.

"I have always been interested in getting involved in natural resources, ecology and art," he said. "Planning is community-based ecology work, community improvement and engagement."

Community improvement and engagement is at the root of "Arbol de La Vida," a step toward helping the bosque survive and thrive.

"Some of the more spectacular groves of cottonwoods would be south of Central, on both sides of the river, and north of Rio Bravo," Swanson said. "That's a wider section of the river. Historic flood patterns may have allowed for seeding longer and allowed trees to develop."

The river has done what it could. Now, it's our turn.

Galleries

ALBUQUERQUE OPENINGS

Monday

Jonathan Abrams MD Art Gallery, University of New Mexico Hospital, Fifth Floor Ambulatory Care Center, continues works in ink by Shawn Turing from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Through Jan. 24. Free Parking UNM Hospital West Parking Structure at Lomas and Yale. Chris Fenton at 272-9700.

Tuesday

April Price Projects Gallery, 201 Third NW, continues "Transitions" with work by 22 artists from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Through Feb. 1. 850-2307.

Richard Levy Gallery, 514 Central SW, continues "2020 Vision" from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. with Daniel Ballesteros, Mary Ellen Bartley, William Betts, Tricia Capello, Jason DeMarte, Dylan Hausthor, Jocelyn Lee, Sallie Scheuffer, Manjari Sharma and Shoshannah White. Through March 6. 766-9888.

Thursday

EXHIBIT 208, 208 Broadway SE, continues "Islands" new paintings by Heather Bingham from 11a.m. to 4 p.m. Through Feb. 1. 450-6884.

Gallery with a Cause, NM Cancer Center Foundation, 4901 Lang Ave NE, south of Paseo del Norte off Jefferson, hosts a gallery walk and talk for "The Art of Healing" from 6 to 7:30 p.m. The show includes 19 artists curated by Regina Held. 828-3791.

Friday

Thirsty Eye, 206 Broadway SE, reception for "Large Scale" new collage work by Kim Arthun from 5-8 p.m. with music by Dawn Hotel from 7 to 9 p.m. The solo exhibit runs through Feb. 22. 450-6884.

Saturday

Palette Contemporary Art and Craft, 7400 Montgomery NE, Mossman Center, reception for "Art that RESINates" paintings by Charlie Aldrich and jewelry by Carla Pennie from 1 to 3 p.m. 855-7777.

PLACITAS OPENING

Today

Wild Hearts Gallery, 221 B State Hwy 165, east of I-25 exit 242, continues "The Pantheon of Colors" new paintings by Carol Ordogne from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The solo exhibition runs through Feb. 2. 361-2710.

SANTA FE OPENINGS

Today

Museum of International Folk Art, 706 Camino Lejo, Museum Hill, reception for "From Combat to Carpet: The Art of Afghan War Rugs" from 1 to 4 p.m. Through Aug. 30. 505-476-1200.

Murder mystery 'Orient Express' debuts at the ALT

BY KATHALEEN ROBERTS
ASSISTANT ARTS EDITOR

In 2017, American playwright Ken Ludwig dusted off Hercule Poirot's "little gray cells" to create a new version of Agatha



IF YOU GO

WHAT: "Murder On the Orient Express"

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Friday and