
Creators lead guests on tour of art Collection in Oxnard

By Jeremy Foster Special to The Star

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For some people, The Collection at RiverPark is Oxnard's latest shopping district. For others, it's become the city's exquisite art garden.

On Thursday evening, more than 20 people toured the shopping center's exhibits and heard firsthand from three of the local artists commissioned to create an outdoor environment inspired by the California coast.

Organized by the Carnegie Art Museum in Oxnard, the tour included discussions of the 21 art installations and was led by museum Director Suzanne Bellah and Ventura County artists Stephen Schäfer, Frank Bauer and Susan Stinsmuehlen-Amend.

From colorful murals on the walls to mosaics on the sidewalks to shiny, whimsical water fountains, the installations were designed to give shoppers a chance to experience one-of-a-kind art as they stroll the 60-acre complex.

Stinsmuehlen-Amend, of Ojai, started the tour with a discussion of her massive porcelain tile mural that faces Highway 101.

Called "Shopping List," the mural juxtaposed a variety of imagery representing the Central Coast, such as a sign on Las Posas Road, agricultural fields, palm trees and ocean waves.

At the center's park, Stinsmuehlen-Amend showed her "Coastal Conversion" fountain statue made of bronze, copper and stainless steel that portrays a bronze net rising out of the water and unraveling as steelhead trout leap outward, water spurting from their

mouths.

The large mural was based on 20-inch wide watercolor painting that was sent to a tile company, she said.

Through Nov. 24, the museum will display samples of works by the artists who were commissioned to create the installations for The Collection. The scaled works represent the seeds of the large outdoor installations and give insight into the creative process, Bellah said.

Stinsmuehlen-Amend said she was thankful to show the work because seeing the installations to fruition was a long journey.

Shea Properties had planned for art installations as part of its design. But the recession slowed the center's development, said Leticia Wilson, director of marketing at The Collection.

This week, visitors saw the latest installation called "Charting a Course," a collaboration between architect Tyson Cline and photographer Stephen Schafer, both Ventura residents.

Large metal rectangles were carefully angled and resemble an unfolded map of the coastline of Ventura. Schafer described their creation as a "kinetic mural" where movement occurs as the viewer walks past the sculpture.

From one side, the map of the Channel Islands and the coastline come into relief. From the other is the Anacapa Island arch.

Suzanne Spillman drove from Santa Barbara to hear from the artists.

"I think it's remarkable that this developer had the insight to sponsor and make it possible for these artists to do this," she said. "I wish every outside shopping mall in America did this."

Kitty Merrill marveled at a ceramic tile mural produced by Bauer, who spent six months hand-making the tiles and three months installing the piece.

Merrill said the exhibit "is a great example of public art."

“I have lived in Oxnard for 25 years, so I feel a greater sense of investment in this,” she said. “I feel really proud of Oxnard.”

Bauer, who also created ceramic benches and tile sidewalk medallions, said the exhibit lives up to the purpose of art.

“That is connecting with people,” he said. “People decorate their living rooms with artwork for an experience. This is our extended living room, and we hope it lifts the spirits of all who see what we’ve done.”



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