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Artist's refuge

Eco-art boxes come to New Paltz

by Erin Quinn

Simon Draper, the founder of Habitat for Artists, is attempting to turn the notion of artist space upside down and literally inside out. His eco-art spaces will soon make their way to four or five locations in the Village of New Paltz, including the SUNY New Paltz campus, the Dorsky Museum, Rich Gottlieb's parking lot on lower Main Street and Historic Huguenot Street. The 6-by-8 modular studios resemble very colorful and glorified latrines in their shape and size. But the spirit is anything but waste-producing.



Founder of Habitat for Artists Simon Draper and local artist Todd Sargood with the first of several studio spaces to be installed in New Paltz.

"The idea is to expand the role of the artist in the community and to expand the role of creativity in the community," said Draper, during a recent New Paltz Village Board meeting where he presented his concept.

According to Draper, the eco-art spaces use all "non-toxic materials, reusable materials" and the structures themselves "are used as pieces of art work," he said, showing the trustees and public photographs of previous structures that were used by artists in Beacon where he first launched his idea.

The boxes are built on a 2-by-6 concrete slab, which is anchored by old railroad ties. Many of them have a corrugated overhanging roof, and an old pane-glass door installed, as well as small windows to let in the sunshine.

"They're big enough to work in but not to live in," he assured the board. "And if there is any damage to the structures we are under contract to have that damage replaced or the structure removed within 48 hours."

That said, Draper wants to raise consciousness, not only about the role of the artists and of art in daily community life, but about the environment and how much space one really needs.

"How much space do we need to create art?" he said. "How much space do we really need to live in to have a fulfilling and meaningful life?"

The idea, according to Draper, for the New Paltz project is to have a revolving residency in the studios. He has teamed up with the Village Environmental Commission, CODA, the Dorsky Museum, the art department at SUNY New Paltz, Scenic Hudson, Historic Huguenot Street and was seeking support from the Village Board to possibly place an artist box in a visible, public location.

At first, it was suggested to him that he propose placing one of these studios in a box at the Sojourner Truth Park along the Wallkill River. Trustee Jean Gallucci suggested that if he wants visibility, that park might not be the best place and that it also experiences flooding during heavy rains.

Another trustee suggested the Moriello Park Pool as being a great public place to place a studio

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in the summer, as there is space, shade, many families and the possibility of interaction between the visiting artists and the public.

Draper said he would gladly take suggestions from the trustees and encouraged them to ask any questions they had. Deputy Mayor Michael Zierler asked what would become of the art created in these studios once the program ended.

"Would there be an exhibition or some type of show so that the community could see what the various artists created?" he asked.

Draper said that "we're not working towards a show, but the act of creating the art in these spaces and using the spaces as installation art pieces really is the 'show.'"

Zierler suggested that he bring this concept to the Town of New Paltz as they are "currently revising their master plan in a way that best reflects community values, land-use issues and how we grow and develop without tipping the balance of all of the scenic beauty, agricultural lands and vital natural resources that we're fortunate to have."

"I think that this idea of yours could be metaphor -- a real beacon in the way we think about guiding our future," he added.

The eco-art spaces will arrive on the SUNY campus in the two locations in April and then at Historic Huguenot Street in May with more scheduled to arrive and artists to be rotated in residency until October 2009.

To learn more about these artist spaces go to www.habitatforartists.blogspot.com.



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