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Sac State helps with Broadway art project

A major municipal art project that will create works in “augmented reality” along Broadway has brought Sacramento State together with the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission (SMAC), the Greater Broadway Partnership District and the Urban Land Institute.

Through this alliance, 11 artists have been commissioned to create virtual public artworks as part of the project called “Broadway Augmented.”

A year ago, SMAC Director Shelly Willis was invited by the Partnership and the Urban Land Institute to advise them on public art in the neighborhood along Broadway from Interstate 5 to Highway 99. The groups were studying how to infuse new vitality into this eclectic stretch of restaurants, businesses and a historic theater.

At the same time, Willis recently had met with Professor Rachel Clarke, who teaches New Media Art at Sacramento State and has exhibited her work in Europe and throughout the United States.

Clarke described a project in which artists would create works that can be experienced through “augmented reality” using smartphones and other devices such as tablets. Linked to a physical site through GPS or image recognition, a sculpture or mural appears on a building’s wall or on the street when viewed with the smartphone or tablet. The environment on the device’s screen accurately changes perspective as the viewer walks around the physical structure.

“There are lots of capabilities,” Clarke says. “It’s basically a customized virtual art experience that changes with the viewer’s location and position.”

The National Endowment for the Arts has awarded the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission a $20,000 grant to fund the project.

Willis and Clarke commissioned 11 artists to design public artworks that will be translated into this technology as part of the continued exploration of what public art could look like in the Broadway District.

“Augmented reality will give the participating artists the opportunity to imagine what might be possible without having to actually make it physically,” Willis says.
For Sacramento State, the project will serve as an educational tool. Students and recent graduates from Clarke’s Electronic Art courses are making virtual mockups to illustrate how the technology may be used, and they will assist some of the artists to convert their designs into 3D models for the “augmented reality” platform.

During the past few weeks, participating artists have been touring the Broadway area, learning about the technology and determining where their virtual work will be placed. The design process is expected to take most of the winter. The grand “unveiling” of the project will take place during the Second Saturday art event Sept. 13.

“A project like this can really help visitors, residents and community leaders envision what’s possible,” Willis says.

And members of the Greater Broadway Partnership are enthused about being part of such an innovative project.

“We look forward to meeting the selected artists, showing them how Broadway is today, sharing the area’s history and then seeing how they will capture and express that sense of place in their art,” says Teresa Rocha, the Partnership’s executive director. “This is something not only area residents will value, but something that will bring people from around the region to experience and enjoy.”

The participating artists are: Clarke (new media), Jose Carlos Casado (multimedia), Malcolm Cochran (sculpture and public art works), Michael Rees (sculpture and digital media), Mark Emerson (paintings and works on paper), Ben Hunt (sculpture), Janet Zweig (installations, public artworks), Joseph Delappe (new media), Sabrina Ratte (video), Gioia Fonda (mixed media) and Rebecca Krinkez (multimedia, sculpture, installations).

For more information on the project, contact Shelly Willis at swillis@cityofsacramento.org, Teresa Rocha at greaterbroadwaypartnership@gmail.com or Rachel Clarke at rclarke@csus.edu. For media assistance, call Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156 or Jan Burch at the Greater Broadway Partnership, (916) 501-5594 (cell). – Craig Koscho

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