

Blue Heron Project unveils 15 statues

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- Discussion

Tony Borreson / Winona Daily News | Posted: Sunday, April 22, 2007 12:00 am | No Comments Posted

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Some had scenes painted on them. Some had abstract designs. One was caged.

Fifteen blue heron statues decorated by area artists as part of a Fine Arts Commission fundraiser were unveiled Saturday.

"I'm excited about how our community has come together to support this fun and crazy idea," project chairwoman Bernadette Mahfood told a crowd of hundreds in the courtyard at Winona State University.

The project took about four years, Mahfood said. And she is happy with the results.

"What the artists have done is way over the top," she said.

One statue, the "Elvis Haaron Presley," was painted to look like the king of rock 'n' roll. Another of the seven-foot birds was covered with yellow, maroon and blue geometric patterns.

Cynthia Jennings glued objects she found outside to her statue: Leaves, zebra mussels, broken glass and pine cones gave the sculpture some texture, setting it apart from most of the others.

Jennings said she wanted the statue to reflect what she sees around Winona.

Winona resident John Finn said Jennings' statue, titled "Backwater Shy Poke," was his favorite. "It is an imaginative use of things you find in the river," he said.

Artist Matthew Semke took a conceptual approach. He left his statue white - except for the eyes, which he painted red - and enclosed it in a red cage.

"I had a couple of bones to pick with the rules of the contest," he said.

Semke thought the constraints placed on the artists, like being required to find a sponsor, defeated the purpose of art.

He thought his application was clearly a jibe. The title for his piece, "Artists selected will be required to sign a contract," came directly from the contest rules, he said.

Semke didn't expect to be selected, but the selection committee approved his idea. The herons will sit at various locations around town until fall, when they will be auctioned off. Any proceeds will go to support local fine and performing arts.

Posted in News on *Sunday, April 22, 2007 12:00 am* Updated: 1:37 pm.