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Sparks fly as TAMU-CC Sculpture Class welds art with nature in South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center partnership!

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CORPUS CHRISTI—In a unique fusion of art, community and nature, students from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi's Sculpture I class, led by Graduate Instructor Ian Manseau '26, created wire sculptures now on display at the South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center, 8545 S. Staples St., through at least mid-November. The collaboration marks a first-time partnership between the University and the non-profit organization, with students' work collectively named "**WIRED LIFE**."

The project combines zootomy, wire sculpting, metal cutting and welding techniques to create sculptures of local wildlife, including blue crabs, heron and pelicans, which were showcased at the Gardens' "Moonlight LUAU in the GARDENS" fundraising event on Friday, Oct. 4. For many of the students, this is their first experience working with wire sculpture, and they've found the process challenging and rewarding. The exhibit is included in Botanical Gardens general admission.



From behind the half-formed wire shape of a rabbit mid-bound, pliers in hand, John Conyers '25, an art major and non-traditional student, shared inspiration for his piece.

"I grew up in South Texas, and cottontail rabbits are regular visitors around where I live," Conyers explained. "I find the athletic movement of the animal fascinating, although it's quite a challenge turning the vision I have in my mind into reality; the wire doesn't always do what I want it to do. I'm mainly a drawing-based artist, so sculpting was a new venture for me. Ian has been an amazing teacher, though. He has a lot of insight into sculpture."

For Ianna Chay '26, embarking on the sculpture class has led to a new appreciation for repurposing material and the variety of skills involved in sculpting. The BFA student has decided upon a particularly intricate piece for the installation.



"I am creating a model of a Portuguese Man O' War, required various methods of metal work — techniques that were completely new to me," she said. "For me, it was about figuring out how to express the animal's features with the materials we had. Initially, I had to decide between using just the tie wire or learning to utilize techniques like MIG welding and plasma cutting. Ultimately, I decided to go with the latter. Even though it was challenging, I did it because I wanted to capture the complex structure of the Man O' War."

(more)

The inspiration for this collaboration came from first-time instructor, current MFA student and established artist Manseau during a visit to the Gardens with his young nephews, Leo and Jameson. “During our visit, I thought that this would be a great place for an installation,” Manseau said. “So, I reached out last semester, and over the summer, I met with Executive Director Dr. Michael Womack, and Marketing Director MaryJane Crull, who were thrilled to support the project.”

South Texas Botanical Gardens supports the arts, education, conservation

“Art and botanical gardens are a fit,” explained Crull. We have many pieces in different mediums acquired over time throughout our exhibits, including two large bronze sculptures by world renown sculptor Kent Ullberg; a recent pair of bronze Sandhill Cranes by H.W. Tatum, Jr.; plus the scenic themed art in the Sensory Garden by the late Danny O’Dowdy; souvenir pieces from our “Scrapdaddy” exhibit in 2013, and several others.” Partnering with the University perfectly aligns with our education and community-involvement goals,” she added.

The sculptures, installed the first week of October, gave students hands-on experience in the realm of public art installation. “Installing public works is a whole other beast,” Manseau said. “This opportunity allows students to witness the intricate process and logistical challenges involved, which is far more demanding than a traditional gallery exhibit.” The display will run at least through November 17, with sale of select pieces being discussed.

Womack pointed out “*Wired Life*” leads into H-E-B’s “*Texas Recycling Day*,” November 15-17; and *Holly-Days at the Gardens* beautiful Christmas recycling exhibit, begun with artist Shelia Rogers green bottled trees. “Today’s Recycling and Re-Use trends are just one arm of our conservation mission,” he said.

Looking ahead, Manseau is hopeful this dual partnership will continue and is in discussion with Johnathan Durham and Leandra Urrutia, Assistant Professors of Sculpture and Ceramics, respectively. “We’re hoping to make this a permanent event to be held every semester, especially in the springtime as everything comes back to life,” Manseau said. “It would be fantastic to turn this into an inter-departmental project that benefits from such a beautiful public space.” # # #

