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FUNDRAISER

Brackenridge birdhouses to help park conservancy feather its nest

By Deborah Martin
STAFF WRITER

Birds in the market for a swanky new home are in luck.

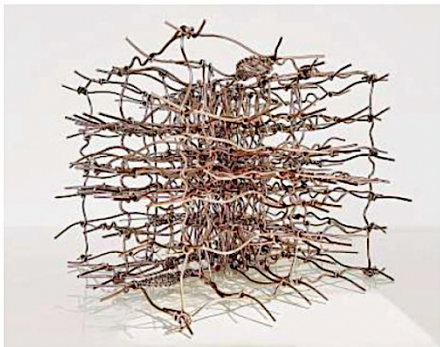
Architects with 10 award-winning firms from across the country are designing birdhouses as part of a fundraiser at Brackenridge Park benefiting the Brackenridge Park Conservancy. After the event on Tuesday, they will be displayed on the grounds of the McNay Art Museum through the end of

turn to the park.

The tiny abodes include a nesting structure designed for hummingbirds by Roberto de Leon, co-founder and principal of Kentucky-based de Leon & Primmer Architecture Workshop; a birdhouse made from a series of hoops designed by Ted Flato, co-founder of San Antonio-based Lake | Flato; and a one designed by San Antonio-based Michael G. Imber, principal of Michael G. Imber Architects. to fit in with other man-

"Hopefully, it's fun and engaging for the next generation of park-goers," said Imber, who spent a lot of time in Brackenridge as a boy and is still taken with it.

The fundraiser, Party in the Park: Birdsong Brackenridge, is the brainchild of Suzanne Mathews, director at Lucifer Lighting, an architectural lighting manufacturer. In addition to raising money, it is designed to spotlight the park's charms and potential as well as celebrating



Courtesy of Leon and Primmer Architecture Workshop
Roberto de Leon of de Leon Primmer Architecture Workshop

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its fine feathered residents.

"Great parks are so important to cities, because they're a place of calm," said Mathews, who serves on the conservancy board. "It's an oasis in the middle of whatever you're doing, whether you're taking a picnic lunch or you're jogging or biking. Just to be there, even for 20 minutes, is a reset."

The fundraiser was inspired by "For the Birds: The Birdsong Project," a sprawling collection of avian-related music, poetry and visual art curated by Grammy-winning music supervisor Randall Poster, who is known for his work with directors Wes Anderson and Martin Scorsese.

Poster is co-hosting the event with Mathews.

It will include Champagne on the train that circles the park, dinner by the waterfall and the opportunity to chat with the architects. Those who go will be treated to a bird song sound bath curated by Poster.

The evening also will include selections from "For the Birds." There's a lot to choose from. More than 220 artists took part, including Beck, Tilda Swinton, Elvis Costello, Laurie Anderson, Esperanza Spalding and Yoko Ono. All of the work was pulled together into a 20-LP box set benefiting the National Audubon Society. It also has a Spotify playlist.

The top two levels of sponsorships for the fundraiser, which go for \$25,000 or \$50,000, include a copy of the box set.

The project grew out of the quarantine stage of the pandemic, when Poster started to take note of natural sounds that hadn't registered for him before. He hoped "For the Birds" would do that for others.

"It would be a way to celebrate bird life but also to draw people's attention to the challenges of bird life without having to politicize it," he said. "Pretty much nobody wants to see birds die."

Poster has done several events across the country connected to "For the Birds." When Mathews asked him if he might be interested in helping with the Brackenridge fundraiser, he immediately said yes.

"She caught the fever of utilizing the arts to celebrate bird song and bird life and also to



Courtesy Snehsetta

Architects Craig Dykers and Elaine Molinar with Snehsetta created a rendering of a birdhouse they designed for a fundraiser for the Brackenridge Park Conservancy. The birdhouse is made of an ostrich egg and a branch.

focus people on some of the challenges, and bringing together a community of creative people to joyfully approach the situation," Poster said during a visit to San Antonio in November. "So there was no arm twisting at all — it was, let's go, let's do this for San Antonio."

The architects who designed the birdhouses had a similar response. All worked on the project pro bono.

Some who are based outside of Texas have connections to the city.

Judy Peske, an interior designer with Gensler, grew up near San Antonio and enjoyed visiting Brackenridge Park as a child. She designed a sleek white abode intended to evoke a Fabergé egg.

Craig Dykers, an architect with Snehsetta, also visited the park in his youth. He said in a statement that he thinks the park helped foster his love for landscape architecture. He and colleague Elaine Molinar designed a nest consisting of a



Sinna Nasser/New York Times
Grammy-winning music supervisor Randall Poster will co-host the Party in the Park benefit.

re-purposed ostrich egg with a branch below it to give birds a spot to alight.

Other participating architects include Marlon Blackwell, Everett L. Fly, David Jameson, Tom Kundig and Angie Brooks and

Larry Scarpa.

De Leon said yes to the project because birdsong has become an important part of his routine. For the past year and a half or so, his firm has started each day by playing a recording from a book about North American birds published by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

"It's a constant source of inspiration for us every day in the office," he said.

For the benefit, he decided to build something for hummingbirds. In researching them, he learned that they don't use birdhouses. Instead, they build intricate nests for their eggs with found materials that they bind with spider web silk. The structure is built so that it expands as the fledglings grow.

"We wanted to emulate the kind of craft and care that goes into what's really a very tightly structured hummingbird nest and celebrate all the intricacy that goes into that," he said.

"Our installation is really about providing a habitat for the hum-

PARTY IN THE PARK: BIRDSONG BRACKENRIDGE

What: Fundraiser benefiting the Brackenridge Park Conservancy.

When: 6 p.m. Tuesday

Where: Brackenridge Park, 3700 N. Saint Mary's St.

Details: Sponsorships range from \$3,000 for two tickets to \$50,000 for a table of up to 14; birdsongbrackenridge.com.

mingbirds to build their nest on, but also it's scaled to the hummingbird."

Imber didn't have a particular bird in mind when he designed his contribution. And, he said, if some other creature were to take up residence in it, he's OK with that.

"I don't know a lot about birdhouses, and functionally, which ones work for which kind of birds," he said. "Honestly, I don't care if a squirrel lives in it."

He looked to the park itself for inspiration. Among the most distinctive man-made elements are the faux bois — or fake wood — footbridge and other pieces designed by Mexican artist Dionicio Rodriguez.

"It's something that creates this visual delight within the park as well as this kind of playfulness," Imber said. "I really wanted to do something that spoke to that unique, fun history of what Brackenridge is."

He designed the structure and asked artist Carlos Cortes to build it. Cortes, a great-nephew of Rodriguez, has continued the family tradition of working in faux bois.

"Carlos was the perfect candidate, not only because he's capable but because he's connected to this lineage of not only the Rodriguez brothers, but this unique San Antonio tradition of faux bois," Imber said. "So I could think of no better monument to this idea of what Brackenridge is than a faux bois birdhouse."

"My greatest wish is that 10 years from now, it doesn't feel like somebody just recently placed this in the park. I want it to feel that it's always been there and has always been a part of what the park is."

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