

## Gallup's new Tiny Art brightens downtown

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent  
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A pensive soul pondering the universe from atop a fence post. A child playing hide-and-seek with her lamb at a pipe stub. Gallupians could be forgiven for thinking these mini-masterpieces are the work of fairies, but the artists are life-sized – even if the art is Tiny.

The community and visitors will get their introduction to Tiny Art starting with the first ArtsCrawl of the season April 8. Keeping with the theme of art that is meant to be spontaneously discovered, GallupARTS will debut the project with a scavenger hunt starting and ending at the ART123 Gallery.

Tiny Art is all about eye level, so visitors are encouraged to walk around downtown and discover. The artists will each be at their installations to share their inspirations.

Scavengers will get the first clue at ART123; figuring that out takes them to the first installation to meet the artist and get the next clue and a token. Those who collect all six tokens may redeem them for a prize at the gallery.

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The installations are a range of styles and media, and are all 3-D. The selection committee voted unanimously for each one and while there was no assigned theme, GallupARTS Director Rose Eason said they each have a surprising, playful quality.

The local artists are excited to unveil the project, even though it presented challenges that had some of them working right up to curtain time. Undaunted, they tackled the assignment to turn ugly little imperfections into shining, if tiny, works of art.

They shared their inspirations and experiences ahead of the show. Locations are not included here to avoid spoiling the scavenger hunt.

Casey Tom teaches welding at UNM-Gallup and wants to show current and potential students the possibilities.

"I like to show them what welding can be. Most schools just teach you to weld in a straight line," Tom said.

Tom's installation turns a metal post stump into a place for a little girl to play with her lamb, in praise of the Diné relationship with sheep and the strength of the women who are the backbone of the culture.

"Last year my family lost our grandmother and a lot of the women elders in our family. I wanted to show how strong Native women are," Tom said.

Some of those women are Tiny artists. Sheila Nez created a set of resin casts with local flora set in, but viewers will miss them unless they look down: they're in the recesses left where metal parking meter posts were cut off at ground level. The size and shape look a little like petri dishes, but they're also lenses on the local landscape.

Small is Nez's milieu: she's been beading for years. That's reflected in her casts, which are built

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around the colors of precious stones like turquoise, spiny oyster and onyx.

Those colors also feature prominently in the planters that Raven Bright painted. His blend of traditional and street art morphed cast concrete planters with a monotone relief design into colorful representations of Acoma, Hopi, Navajo and Zuni pottery.

"I wanted to pay homage to the Native peoples of that area, while also showcasing myself as a hip-hop based creator," Bright said.

Katie Benally replaced some broken and missing tiles on a downtown façade with mosaics using found glass that suits her environmentally-conscious aesthetic.

"Instead of fixing things, I make them look strange or weird or interesting," Benally said. "It's important to expose people to art they might not expect, when they are not expecting it, to give them a little hope."

Hope was also an important theme for Rachel Brown, who joined the Miyamura High School staff as an art teacher last year. Her thoughtful figure sitting on a fence post felt like a way to process some bad news she received the day the application period closed, so the figure is an expression of resilience for viewers.

"I want them to think about how they perceive things. How they look at the world can change the way they experience it," she said. "It's us who decides what our experience ultimately is going to be."

At 15, MB is the youngest artist in the group. She's done "a whimsical mushroom mosaic" where a missing brick left a gap in a low wall.

"I have been sketching lots of fungi lately. I like playing with the shapes and colors," she said.

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She said the project taught her something about herself.

"I can conquer new mediums," she said. "Now I have a new skill and new ideas for future art."

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