

Elayna Toby

IN THIS KINETIC SCULPTOR'S LATEST CONSTRUCTION, THE ARTIST IS US.

At 10 a.m. on a Saturday morning last November, hundreds of tiny pieces of found art rested atop a series of connected tables inside a function room at the Boynton Beach City Library. There were buttons, soda-can tabs, chains, keys, shower curtain rods, ornamental gewgaws and slabs of rusted metal that had long outlasted their original function. Anything that contained a hole, was lighter than a candy bar, and that was smaller than the average hand was fair game.

All of this secondhand detritus, and much more, have been resurrected from oblivion for a limited-time, one-of-a-kind installation spearheaded by Palm Springs artist Elayna Toby, a figure as recognizable for her smiles and positivity as for her shock of silver hair. In her latest project, titled “Kinetic-Connections,” these objects will hang in vertical strands tied together with wire, which will dangle from the branches of a historic, deciduous kapok tree located a few steps away from the library. The refurbished tree will be on display Feb. 6–8 as part of the city’s International Kinetic Art Exhibit and Symposium biennial, and Toby hopes to construct more than 200 strands, many of which could run more than 12 feet in length. She encourages attendees to walk through them.

“For years, I’ve had a vision of creating an installation in a tree,” says Toby, whose background is in public horticulture administration. “All of my kinetic art is suspended work—what you might think of as mobiles—and all of it interacts with the wind. We want people to be close enough that the objects chime.”

A former jewelry designer who transitioned into kinetic art in the mid-2000s, Toby was wearing earrings of her own making, each one comprised of a bead and a found metal washer strung together with copper wire—part of her “Wash and Wear” series. She has an incalculable number of trinkets at home just like it, obtained from years of searching curbs and parking lots and flea markets. And while she contributed thousands of objects from her cache to form “Kinetic-Connections,” she’s hoping at least half of the exhibited pieces will be community donations gathered at one of the three workshops at the

library, and during “upcycle” stations set up in December.

Contributors to the project were asked to design strands themselves—taping the objects to cardboard for Toby to officially string together later—and then record a “video selfie” explaining their creation and the pieces they donated. The short videos will play on a loop at the tree site during the installation’s brief run. (After the exhibition, the strands will be on sale for an estimated \$150 each, with proceeds benefiting the city’s Art in Public Places program and the Resource Depot.)

“My work is really an invitation to reimagine ordinary things,” she says. “I’m interested in the objects, and I’m interested in the people and their stories, and the kinetic connection—about the energy and synergy of what happens when people come together to create something, when people share their stories.”

For Debbie Coles-Dobay, public art manager for the city of Boynton Beach and executive director of the International Kinetic Art Exhibit and Symposium, it was this community involvement that sold her on Toby’s proposition.

“When we had all of our submissions for the outdoor art exhibition, we had big, iconic pieces that move with wind or with solar,” Coles-Dobay says. “What she presented was very unique in that it had the community engagement part of it. The whole idea as a public art manager is to get the public to understand the value of public art, and that’s exactly what Elayna’s project does. It totally immerses them into the project.”

By 11 a.m. on the final donation workshop in the library, the room was buzzing with activity, as new and repeat visitors channeled their inner artists, recorded their selfies and shared the stories behind their donations; one woman supplied a small hammer she bought as a housewarming gift for an ex-lover. Another, Toby says, created a symbolic family tree, from herself—the hex nut at the top—all the way through her unborn grandchild.

“Out of inanimate, ‘nothing’ objects so to speak, she had a whole metaphor that told a story,” she says. “There’s an inner artist in us all. This isn’t about me; it’s about everybody else. They are the creators. This is their story.”

Elayna Toby in her studio

IF YOU GO

WHAT: International Kinetic Art Exhibit and Symposium

WHERE: All around the city of Boynton Beach

WHEN: Feb. 6-8

DETAILS: In addition to Toby's "Kinetic-Connections," 16 sizable examples of kinetic art—aka "art in motion"—will be on display on Boynton, with some remaining on view for a full year. Upward of 60 smaller artworks will be showcased in an indoor exhibition, and nine speakers will address the public about kinetic art—all of it at no charge.

CONTACT: 561/742-6026, intlkineticartevent.org

