

The Argonaut

Local News & Culture

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CORNER BALL PARK GROUP — Community members including Betsy Goldman, Adam Davis, Stephen Pouliot, Todd von Hoffmann, Nadine Parkos, Antonio Martinez, Phoebe Zimmermann, D. Rufus Savage-Friedman, Finnegan Wong-Smith, Wilma Wong, Hedwin Naimark, Robin Murez, Denise Ruttman and Robert Naimark are getting involved in an effort to transform underutilized Venice street corners into green spaces. (Argonaut photo by T.W. Brown)

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Sculptor and community groups work to transform public spaces to symbolize Venice's eclectic unity

BY VINCE ECHAVARIA

Formed around concrete sphere sculptures, the mosaic images depict symbols of faces, triangles, sea creatures and sea plants.

While the images may not seem to have an obvious connection, the artist who created the spherical sculptures says they can represent aspects of life in the beachside community of Venice.

Describing her latest work at her open-air studio on Abbot Kinney Boulevard, Venice sculptor Robin Murez explains that her art is about transforming public spaces to make the viewer feel more connected

to the work. Through her mosaic spheres, which she calls palas based on the Italian word for ball, Murez says she intends to portray images associated with Venice.

The symbols of triangles are representative of the neighborhood along Venice Boulevard known as the Silver Triangle, the facial images of the Colonnade structure symbolize historic Venetian architecture, while the images of sea life can show the community's connection to the beach. Such examples are about eclectic unity and are ways that viewers can identify with specific areas of Venice through art, Murez said.

We like to think of Venice as being its own community, she says. We pride ourselves on being individuals and being creative.

Murez, a former attorney who has lived in Venice about 20 years, says each of the black and white mosaic sculptures takes approximately 40 hours to finish.

She is currently working on completing the first set of five sphere sculptures to be incorporated as part of a park project at a former enclosed lot on Venice Boulevard at Ocean Way. The city-owned lot between the Venice Library and Kim's Market was awarded a \$10,000 Los Angeles beautification grant last year to be transformed into a pocket park, and Murez said a community plan is under way to place her sphere sculptures there for seating, along with an in-ground maze and landscaping.

The Corner Ball Park Project involves several community groups and is part of an effort to transform underutilized or blighted street corners throughout Venice into neighborhood green spaces fit with landscaping and sculptural seating. The project was unanimously supported by the Venice Neighborhood Council at its meeting in March.

The first project is planned at the formerly enclosed lot on Venice Boulevard, and community members hope to expand the effort to other neighborhoods, allowing each area to convey its own identity through the art project.

It's a way of creating neighborhood pride, Murez said of the project.

Neighbors can work together to represent their areas through the projects and in doing so, they can get to know each other better, Murez said. The residents may decide to create neighborhood logos to display at cultural events and apply symbols specific to their area on the park pala sculptures, which can enhance neighborhood identity, Murez said.

It's based on an historic tradition, a way to get to know our neighbors, to enjoy the eclectic unity of our community, and to form neighborhood identities, enabling Venice festivities, Murez said. The ball parks will make Venice more walkable and more beautifully green, one little pocket park at a time.

Among the community organizations involved in the effort are the Venice Action Committee, the Venice Public Art forum and Venice 2000, which plans to help with park landscaping.

Murez estimates that each corner ball park will need about \$5,000 to \$10,000 in funding to be completed. Those working with the projects are encouraging community members to take part by finding potential sites for the parks, helping to raise funds and creating park designs that are unique to the neighborhood.

Residents associated with the project praised the effort for helping to boost neighborhood pride in a community with a rich arts background.

I think this is a great opportunity for awareness on several levels, said Stephen Pouliot, a member of the

Venice Heritage Foundation. It will be fascinating to go neighborhood to neighborhood and see iconic pieces of sculpture.

Adam Davis, an architect who lives in the neighborhood where the first project is planned, sees the parks providing a common thread to stitching all the neighborhoods together.

Venice Heritage Foundation president Todd von Hoffmann called the project completely appropriate. It will make a spectacular addition to our public art, he said.

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