

# THE EXPANDED ENVIRONMENT'S "BIOCITY" IS A BIG IDEA WITH AN EVEN BIGGER PAYOFF

BY SUSIE TOMMANEY

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"BioCity" by The Expanded Environment at Lawndale Art Center.

*Courtesy of The Expanded Environment (Ned Dodington, Christoph Ibele, Jon LaRocca and Haldre Rogers)*

**"BioCity"** isn't much to look at yet, but this eco-minded structure by the art collective The Expanded Environment is a big idea with an even bigger payoff. Installed on the Mary E. Bawden Sculpture Garden at Lawndale Art Center, it's designed to morph and evolve over a six-month period with the goal of first attracting plants, then insects, butterflies, birds, wildlife and eventually humans.

Designed by Ned Dodington, Christoph Ibele, Jon LaRocca and Haldre Rogers, "BioCity" begins with a gridded wooden frame composed of plywood and scrap lumber. By the end of February, phase two's installation of soil and plants will be completed. During March and April, the third phase calls for insect observation and cultivation, with its *voilà* moments scheduled for April through June as it transforms into a living sculpture.

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The group's goal, in addition to creating a beautiful piece of art, is to deliver "a message of eco-awareness, biodiversity and cross-species collaboration."



Detail from "Alkanziyya" by Jorge Galván Flores at Lawndale Art Center.

*Photo by Susie Tommaney*

Other exhibits tie in nicely with the ecological theme, including an installation by Jorge Galván Flores. "**Alkanziyya**" consists of a pair of leaf-adorned faceless human forms suspended from the ceiling; videos of shirtless men tossing blocks up to the worker in the next monitor; a collection of small, sewn fabric dolls; a fabric-pieced, wall-mounted stole; and a clothing rack displaying shirts constructed from a leaf-patterned fabric.

It's clear from viewing Randy Bolton's works in the John M. O'Quinn Gallery that this Dallas-born artist, now in his last year of teaching at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, has a sense of humor. His work has been exhibited in hundreds of single or group shows, as well as in Europe and Asia. In "**Flicker + Fade**," he includes a dozen one-, two- or three-panel screen prints, many of which contain thought-provoking phrases such as "end of the," "beginning" and "of the end," or "forever + ever."

Most interesting are Bolton's three-dimensional works that include his trademark screen prints, assembled along with sculptural objects cast from UltraCal and resin that resemble cinder blocks, bricks, tree segments, traffic cones and miniature log cabins. Both *Flicker + Fade* and *Laments (Could've, Would've, Should've)* offer incredibly detailed vignettes that task the viewer with first gazing at one section, then refocusing to look at objects in front or behind.

Also strong is 2013's *Broken Rainbow*, with sculptural objects arranged in a pile of sand, echoing a similar, though not identical, scene in the oversize canvas that serves as its

backdrop. Although Bolton has been living up north, his summers in Texas have inspired much of his work, as the "people, culture, quietness" and especially the landscape allow him to slow down, let time pass and embrace what he refers to as "his T.S. Eliot phase."



*Untitled (original) (detail) by Cinthia Gomez from "Satellite" exhibit at Lawndale Art Center.*

*Photo by Cinthia Gomez*

Upstairs in the Cecily E. Horton Gallery are the results of a creative experiment by three artists who met at the University of Houston. They formed a plan in which each would create one sculpture, known as the "original," and then communicate to the next artist how to make a "copy" through letter writing. Booklets of these communiqués are available to read, containing instructions like "begin to notice the patterns" or cookbook-style lists of required ingredients (pantyhose, fur, makeup sponges). The results are a bit uneven, as it is always more difficult for an artist to absorb somebody else's concept rather than work from his or her own idea, but as a whole the pieces in the "**Satellite**" exhibit by Yma Luis, Cinthia Gomez and Almendra Castillo are sometimes attractive, sometimes horrific, but always interesting.

Don't overlook the third-floor project space containing Georgia Carter's "**Grisaille**" exhibit. Drawing inspiration from antique wallpapers containing hand-painted, mostly gray panoramic landscapes, her works include hand-drawn reproductions in which she "became a human printer," as well as digital depictions of altered monochromatic images.

*"Alkanziyya," "Flicker + Fade," "Satellite," and "Grisaille" continue through February 27, "BioCity" continues through June 11, at Lawndale Art Center, 4912 Main, open Mondays through Fridays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturdays noon to 5 p.m., 713-528-5858, [lawndaleartcenter.org](http://lawndaleartcenter.org).*

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