



Vol. 2 Issue 1 FEBRUARY 2021

CENTENNIAL MUSEUM
AND CHIHUAHUAN DESERT GARDENS
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

Celebrating Life in the Chihuahuan Desert



Welcome

Daniel Carey-Whalen, Director

Welcome to 2021 and the Spring semester here at UTEP. Although things are still quiet on campus, activities at the Centennial Museum and Chihuahuan Desert Gardens are starting to pick up. We have lots of events occurring over the next few months, some virtual and some in-person (hopefully!). February is starting off as a busy month. On February 12, in celebration of the Bhutanese Lunar New Year, Losar, we will launch our Virtual Lhakhang, an online, interactive, educational platform that will enable people from all over the world to experience the only Lhakhang outside of Bhutan. Also, at the end of the month, we will relaunch the virtual exhibit *Tiny Tunnels, Big Connections*, with a 360-degree exhibit walk-thru and a virtual tour led by curator Dr. Vicky Zhuang. February is also Black History Month; and Sam Winer remembers the groundbreaking exhibit, *Mining the Museum* in her article.

Although most of the plants in the Chihuahuan Desert Gardens are currently dormant, Kevin Floyd talks about the *Dalea* genus that blooms in late fall and is still gracing our gardens. Yet, spring is just around the corner and soon the garden will be full of blooms. And that means we are preparing for our annual plant sale, FloraFest. We are hoping it will be an in-person event, however we are making contingency plans in case that is not possible. Regardless, mark your calendars for April 17th and 18th.

We are also reviving UTEP Arts Alive, our collaboration with the Rubin Center and the College of Liberal Arts, and will be participating in UTEP's One Water Cluster's World Water Week. There is so much going on this spring, you will not want to miss out. Please follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) or sign up for our [email blasts](#). Hope to see folks soon.

All the best,

Daniel Carey-Whalen



Bumblebee collecting pollen from
Purple prairie clover (*Dalea purpurea*)

Museum Hours of Operation:

We are temporarily closed to the public until further notice. Please visit our [website](#) for more information.

- CENTENNIAL MUSEUM
Monday through Saturday
10:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.
- CHIHUAHUAN
DESERT GARDENS
Open every day
Dawn to Dusk
- LHAKHANG
Every Wednesday and 1st
Saturday of the Month
11:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.





The Virtual Lhakhang: UTEP's Cultural Jewel from Bhutan

Claudia Ley, Educational Curator



Image of The Lhakhang which was re-erected on the UTEP campus in 2015, as part of the Centennial Plaza celebration.

As many of us are settling into this new year (hopeful it will be nothing like what we experienced in 2020), in Bhutan, Tibet and in other eastern Buddhist countries, the Losar New Year celebration is set to begin on February 12, 2021. This celebration, based on the Buddhist calendar, comes from the Tibetan words “lo” meaning “year” and “sar” meaning “new.” And on this day, the Centennial Museum is excited to finally share [*The Virtual Lhakhang: UTEP's Cultural Jewel from Bhutan*](#), a 360-degree virtual exhibition and interactive guide. Although Bhutan is thousands of miles away, we could not think of a better time to celebrate our friendship with the country that gave us the Lhakhang and encouraged our appreciation for its art, architecture, and people.

The Lhakhang was last open to the public nearly one year ago, and despite the pandemic, visitors continue to inquire about the building and its story. For preservation purposes, the Museum only allows limited access under normal circumstances, therefore creating a virtual exhibit has been a dream for a long time. With only a few months of researching, writing, and planning, we began designing the virtual exhibition and interactive guides alongside David Figueroa from Augment El

Paso and John “Leo” De Frank, a UTEP faculty member and media producer. This one-of-a-kind experience will allow visitors to virtually “visit” the Lhakhang from anywhere in the world, using a mobile device, laptop, or computer.

Through a 360-degree virtual tour composed by Figueroa, a sequence of panoramic photographs of the interior and exterior of the Lhakhang were merged to create this 3D experience. Target points and directional arrows allow the viewer to navigate both outside and inside the building. Visitors can get up close and personal with the floor-to-ceiling paintings, the intricately carved columns and windows, along with the carefully crafted clay sculptures that grace the building's interior. They can also listen to traditional Bhutanese chants and music, and narration about some of the history and traditional arts of Bhutan.



In addition, with the guidance of De Frank, we created an interactive guide with more information about the Lhakhang. Comprised of four main sections, 'The Story Behind the Lhakhang,' 'The Traditional Arts of Bhutan,' 'The Story of Buddha,' and 'Buddhism comes to Bhutan,' curious viewers can go in-depth into the meanings behind the hand painted murals. Additionally, the interactive guide includes photographs, such as images published in the now famous National Geographic magazine article which inspired the architecture of the University. Other photos include when the Lhakhang was first brought to United States and installed at the 2008 Smithsonian Folklife Festival before finding its permanent home at UTEP.

We hope you can join us and share this virtual exhibition and its content. In addition to our virtual launch, we will also be releasing some fun and creative content about the Lhakhang and Bhutanese arts and culture. Follow our social media and website as we will be releasing more content and a downloadable activity book for all ages. And finally, we would like to wish you lots of luck this Losar New Year!



Figuroa taking panoramic photographs of the Lhakhang in early June 2020.



Click below to visit the Lhakhang page



Interior image of Lhakhang, featuring the four pillars that stand at the center of the building.



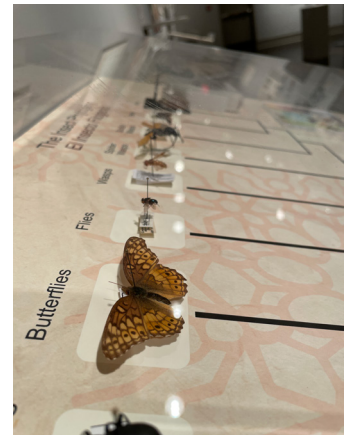
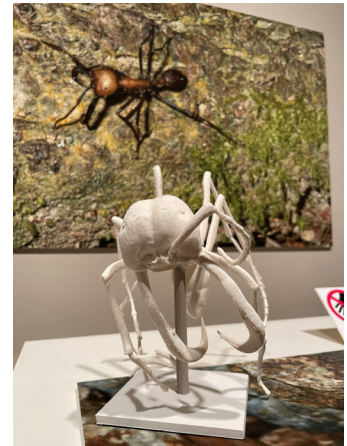
Relaunch of *Tiny Tunnels*

Daniel Carey-Whalen, Director



Tiny Tunnels Exhibit entrance

On February 13th of last year, we launched the exhibit *Tiny Tunnels, Big Connections: Ant Relationships Shape the World*. Curated by Dr. Vicky Zhuang and funded by the National Science Foundation, this exciting and interactive exhibit featured specimens from [UTEP's Biodiversity Collection](#). We opened the exhibit around Valentine's Day to highlight the main theme of the exhibit: relationships. However, after a successful open and a month of steady visitation, the Centennial Museum was forced to close due to Covid-19.



Top and Bottom: Displays at Tiny Tunnels Exhibit

On February 27 of this year, we are relaunching the Tiny Tunnels exhibit with new features for an online audience and hope for a reopening of the Museum in late spring. Although the [online exhibit](#) has been available on our website for several months, we have now included a 360-degree virtual experience, a tour with the curator, and educational activities for students. Furthermore, we have extended the run of the exhibit thru July in hopes that the vaccine and El Pasoans continuing to follow health guidelines will enable people to visit the Museum and see the exhibit in person. We will keep everyone posted!

Please join us on Saturday, February 27 as we relaunch this amazing exhibit!



Display of 3D printed ant



Model of one of the many species of ants first described to science by Dr. Bill Mackay.



Mining the Museum

Samantha Winer, Curator

In the world of museum exhibitions, there are those that are so unique that they change the contemporary playing field in a way that alters the status quo. *Mining the Museum*, by artist Fred Wilson, opened in 1992 in Baltimore, Maryland, and became one of those catalysts for change. The exhibit offered a new way to interpret the past that both captured people's attention and curated history like never before.

Mining the Museum was commissioned by The Contemporary, a Baltimore art collective, and the Maryland Historical Society (MHS). Wilson used the artifacts and archives at the MHS to curate the exhibit.



Child's drawing and a comment: "When I saw the baby carriage with the mask it made me mad. When he showed the punting gun pointing to the black I was sad." (Courtesy of The Contemporary.)



Metalwork 1793-1880

Silver Service Pitchers, steins, and goblets

Baltimore repoussé style, c. 1830-80

Iron Slave Shackles c. 1793-1872

Visitors first became aware of this exhibition's atypical framework as they approached the elevator leading to the exhibit and read a poster asking:

"What is it? Where is it? Why? What is it saying? How is it used? For whom was it created? For whom does it exist? Who is represented? How are they represented? Who is doing the telling? The hearing? What do you see? What do you hear? What can you touch? What do you feel? What do you think? Where are you?"

As visitors walked throughout the MHS galleries, familiar and unfamiliar objects were juxtaposed in new ways. Fine pieces of silverware were displayed

alongside shackles used to confine enslaved persons, a turn-of-the-century baby carriage nestled next to a Ku Klux Klan Hood, ornate chairs surrounded a whipping post. The symbolism that Wilson was alluding to was made clear; the profits from slave labor allowed for the purchase of expensive things; hate is often nurtured from an early age; and the horrors of slavery were often a spectacle for those who benefited. Wilson had created an exhibit that allowed the public to look at America's history in a new way.



Modes of Transportation 1770-1910

Model of Baltimore Clipper
Of type converted to slavers
(rigged as brig) after War of
1812 Sedan Chair used by
Governor Eden of Maryland,
c.1770 Maryland in 1750
Painting by Frank B. Mayer, c.
1856 Baby Carriage c. 1880,
with Ku Klux Klan hood, c.
1900 Donated anonymously

The Contemporary's curator, Lisa Corrin, stated that the goal of the exhibition was "to confront the difficulty of putting theories of diversity and historical revisionism into practice and to offer a model for change responsive to our particular community." In other words, the goal was to shake up the public's experience at the museum and show a new way to learn and interpret the past.

In the early 1990s, many museums were still bastions of the "Great Man" view of history and were unsure of how, or perhaps even unwilling, to change. Wilson, who is of African, European, and Amerindian descent, was asked why he chose to respond to the MHS request. He simply answered, "When I went into the Historical Society, I had kind of a visceral response. I felt uncomfortable there."

To emphasize this discomfort and lack of representation of both people of color and women within the world of museums and history, Wilson made a display that placed three empty pedestals, labeled with the names of Benjamin Banneker, Harriet Tubman, and Frederick Douglass. Directly across from these were three busts of Henry Clay, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Andrew Jackson. This section of the exhibit was simply labeled "Truth Trophy."

The public's response to the exhibit was profound. Children drew stark images in response to the exhibit, which are seen here. One child commented, "When I saw the baby carriage with the mask it made me mad." A retired police officer said, "It interested me in seeing Maryland History in terms of an African American although I am white. I've never been interested in seeing this museum before this show. I want a sense of understanding history as good or bad in order to repeat it or to discard it so as not to repeat it."

Of course, some visitors did not agree with the exhibit and what it represented. "I found *Mining the Museum* "artsy" and pretentious.



"Truth Trophy" Industry award given for truth in advertising c. 1913 (Left) Benjamin Banneker, Harriet Tubman, and Frederick Douglass-empty pedestals with names on labels. (Right) Henry Clay, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Andrew Jackson-pedestals with busts.



It was a waste of space that could be used to better purpose. A museum should answer questions, not raise questions unrelated to the subject." A visiting curator commented, "It snookered me. I liked the pedestals without statues least because they were visually boring and emptiness is decidedly uninteresting, period."

Mining the Museum would go on to radically change the museum landscape, planting seeds that would allow us to alter how we, as museum professionals, create exhibitions and how the public views them. The exhibit gave professionals the permission to interpret the past in a fresh and radical way. It opened many minds and became the impetus for a new, public discourse of our history. Perhaps it is time for another such innovative and creative exhibit. The current exhibit at the Rubin Center for the Visual Arts, [*The Liquid Gates of Time*](#) features artifacts from the Centennial Museum's collection that are interpreted through a creative lens. Is this part of *Mining the Museum's* legacy?



Portrait of Henry Darnell III Painting by Justus Kuhn, c. 1710 Spotlight illuminates enslaved child in dog collar. On the museum's sound system a child's voice asks, "Am I your brother? Am I your friend? Am I your pet?"

Works Consulted:

Corrin, Lisa G., Fred Wilson, and Charles Nix. *Mining the Museum* an Installation by Fred Wilson. New York: The New Press, 1994.

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Houston, Kerr. "How Mining the Museum Changed the Art World." *BmoreArt*, March 3, 2020. <https://bmoreart.com/2017/05/how-mining-the-museum-changed-the-art-world.html>.

Raicovich, Laura. "What Happened When Fred Wilson Dug Beneath a Museum's Floorboards." *Hyperallergic*, August 30, 2019. <https://hyperallergic.com/507245/mining-the-museum-an-installation-by-fred-wilson/>.

Benjamin Banneker's *Astronomical Journal* 1760-1806; slide projection of his chart predicting eclipse of October 18 1800; computer showin night sky of the same day. *Chippendale Table and Celestial Globe* c. 1776



Spotlight on *Daleas* in the gardens

Kevin Floyd, Botanical Curator

Many of the plants in the gardens are now dormant after a run of several weeks with below freezing temperatures. Yet there are still plants flowering, including two species in the genus *Dalea*. They inspired me to spotlight several of the *Dalea* that we have in the gardens.

Dalea is a genus of plants in the legume family. Legumes are a large plant family, with around 19,000 named species worldwide. Most species have compound leaves and produce pod-like fruit. Legumes form associations with bacteria that live in nodules on the roots. These bacteria can convert the nitrogen in the atmosphere, which is not in a form that plants can use, into a form that the plants can use. Because of this, legumes are often used as cover crops to add nitrogen to the soil, and legumes can grow in nutrient-poor soils that many other plants cannot. In addition to *Dalea*, local examples include mesquites, acacias, and Texas mountain laurel. Legumes have also been used by people as food for centuries, with beans as the best-known example.



Purple prairie clover (*Dalea purpurea*) pairs well with Prairie coneflower (*Ratibida columnifera*).

The two species blooming now are Yellow dalea (*Dalea lutea*) and Black dalea (*Dalea frutescences*). Yellow dalea is native to central Mexico south into Guatemala, and just enters the southeast portion of the Chihuahuan Desert. Although it can reach six feet tall, our two specimens top out at about three feet tall and about the same around. The upright stems have yellow flowers that do not begin to flower until late November. There are still some fresh flowers in mid-January, even though most have faded. Black dalea can be found from Oklahoma west through New Mexico, and south into northern Mexico. It forms a mounding shrub with an almost fern-like texture about three feet tall by four feet wide. Ours start to bloom in October, and still look good now. The purple flowers are visited by bees in the fall.



Purple prairie clover (*Dalea purpurea*) attracts a lot of pollinators, such as this syrphid fly. The fly looks like a bee, an adaptation that reduces the likelihood of predation.



Two other species in the garden flower early in the summer. Trailing indigo bush (*Dalea greggii*) is a low-growing shrub that is used as a groundcover in many desert landscapes. Native to west Texas south into Oaxaca, Mexico, it thrives in full sun, forming a mound that is only 1-2 feet tall but can spread 6-8 feet wide. The branches can root where they touch the ground, making this a good choice for controlling erosion. Purple prairie clover (*Dalea purpurea*) has upright stems that are topped with a cylinder of purple flowers. It is found throughout the middle of the United States and into Canada. The stems grow up to three feet tall, and the taproot can grow six feet down. This makes it difficult to find in nurseries as it does not transplant well, but it can be grown from seed. It is a favorite of bumblebees.

All the *Dalea* require good drainage, and most do not like a lot of water. They have been a bit tricky to grow in the gardens, with large plants looking great for multiple years before suddenly dying, while others continue to thrive. But they are very attractive to pollinators and are definitely worth trying if you have an open spot with a lot of sun in your yard.



Top to bottom-
Left to right:
1. Our Yellow dalea (*Dalea lutea*), flowering in December.
2. This Black dalea (*Dalea frutescens*) picture was taken in November. Our plants start flowering in October, and continue throughout the winter.
3. This picture of Black dalea (*Dalea frutescens*) was taken in mid-January, after several days of freezing temperatures earlier in the month.



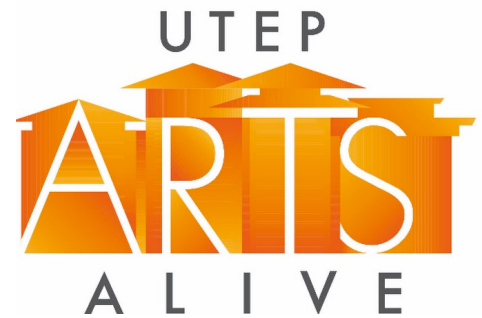
Save The Dates!

UTEP Arts Alive

UTEP Arts Alive is back this spring with different guest speakers and performers. If you missed last semesters Arts Alive performances or would like to see some of your favorite videos again, please click the image below. Dates and list of performances coming soon!

World Water Day

The Centennial Museum is partnering with UTEP's One Water Cluster, an interdisciplinary research collaborative with a focus on water issues. We are working on creating a week-long celebration in conjunction with World Water Day on March 22nd. This year's theme is "reValuing Water." Events during the week will include a dance symposium and an interdisciplinary research symposium, student poster presentations, and a day of activities at Rio Bosque. Information and details will be available soon.



Into the Great White Sands

Into the Great White Sands is an upcoming exhibition of photographs taken by acclaimed photographer Craig Varjabedian. Over the course of five years, the artist created these masterful images as he explored the surrealistic landscape of White Sands National Monument. The exhibit will be opening on April 10, 2021.



FloraFest Plant Sale

We are back! FloraFest 2021 is scheduled for April 17th and 18th. In case you missed us, we are planning on having the sale in person, similar to prior years. We will follow all public health guidelines, such as limiting the number of people shopping at any given time and requiring masks. We will keep everyone updated as we get closer to the event. If you are interested in volunteering, please email Claudia Ley at cley@utep.edu