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)
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!

Click below to visit the Lhakhang page
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.

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!
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.

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.
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.
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?

**Works Consulted:**


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.

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.
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 frutescences*) picture was taken in November. Our plants start flowering in October, and continue throughout the winter.
3. This picture of Black dalea (*Dalea frutescences*) 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