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Cicada Cupcake, Anyone? Avondale Bug Bakery Is Actually An Art Project To Highlight What Could Happen Due To Climate Change

Mina Bloom

7-8 minutes

AVONDALE — You may have heard the buzz about a new bakery in Avondale. Signs in the window promise cicada cupcakes and “high-efficiency” cricket protein powder.

But bad news for adventurous eaters on the Northwest Side: Patisserie Sauterelle is a fake.

Longtime friends and collaborators Katelyn Patton and Beth Reinke created the sham bakery at 2843 N. Milwaukee Ave. as part of an art installation exploring what businesses could exist in the future as climate change takes hold.

Patton and Reinke [created three installations](#) along Milwaukee Avenue curated by EXTRA Projects, an art space in Logan Square. The other two are a fake butterfly store at 2808 N. Milwaukee Ave. and a fake wilderness supply shop selling genetically modified birds at 2912 N. Milwaukee Ave.

The fake bakery imagines how climate change could affect the world’s water supplies and how that, in turn, impacts agriculture.

“We were thinking about how in the future there probably will be a lot more insect-based foods as we run out of water, as people’s ideas of what they’re comfortable with” shift, Patton said.

The installations combine Patton’s work as an interdisciplinary artist and Reinke’s work as an assistant professor of biology at Northeastern Illinois University.

Friends since middle school, Patton and Reinke have always been interested in each other’s work. Patton has accompanied Reinke on her annual trip to northern Wisconsin to study turtles for more than a decade. Reinke said conversations about art with Patton are the reason she studies animal coloration.

So when EXTRA Projects put out a call for exhibits last year, the pair jumped at the opportunity to partner on a project and explore the overlap between art and science.

The two zeroed in on [artificial species replacement](#), or how humans replace species with others in ecosystems as some die out in the face of the climate change crisis.

“We purposefully stayed away from the obvious dystopia in our near future — increased natural disasters and displacement of people — and chose to focus on this still-pressing issue: As species go extinct, how are we going to replace them? And what are the consequences of that?” Reinke said.



(From left) Katelyn Patton and Beth Reinke have been friends since middle school.

Provided

Initially, the plan was to create an exhibit at EXTRA Projects made to look like a “dystopian natural history museum” with unfamiliar creatures born out of artificial species replacement.

EXTRA Projects was immediately on board, co-founder Chris Grieshaber said.

“One of the things I’ve noticed ... is we’ve got a lot of conversations around global warming, but most of these conversations are settled on assigning blame and deciding how much humanity is involved in destroying the world,” Grieshaber said.

“One of the things that’s really cool about this project is Katelyn and Beth have gone and found these really interesting narrative that aren’t necessarily apocalyptic.”

The proposal earned the pair a \$4,000 grant from the city’s Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events.

But when the coronavirus pandemic hit and art spaces like EXTRA Projects shut down, Patton and Reinke had to pivot. With guidance from Grieshaber, the two partnered with community groups like Milwaukee Avenue Alliance and local property owners and create a series of

storefront installations along Milwaukee Avenue near EXTRA Projects.

The project wasn't difficult to pull off. Grieshaber said the property owners they approached were open to the artist-scientist duo livening up the street.

The pair chose a vacant storefront at Milwaukee and Dawson avenues for the fake bakery, aligning with the mission of community leaders like Lynn Basa, of Milwaukee Avenue Alliance, who have been pushing to fill empty storefronts along the Avondale stretch of Milwaukee Avenue for years.

"This type of project dovetails so well with what they're trying to do with Milwaukee Avenue Alliance," Grieshaber said.

"A lot of the focus ... is toward small businesses and making sure that local people with stakes in the health of the area are the ones who settle on these businesses and provide that diverse streetscape. Having something like art installations in those windows is definitely only one part of that conversation, but I happen to think it's an important one."

Patton said they were also excited about the possibility of reaching more people than they might've reached had they created an exhibit that only lived inside EXTRA Projects.



The display at the fake bakery at at 2843 N. Milwaukee Ave.

Mina Bloom/Block Club Chicago

The fake butterfly store lives in a storefront currently home to the Logan Square Chamber of Commerce's office.

The fake butterfly store claims to create genetically modified butterflies in whatever color the customer wants, Patton said. People would buy them for butterfly releases at events.

“A company could match your butterfly colors to your wedding colors, the school you graduated from,” she said.

Some populations of butterflies, like Western monarch butterflies, are seeing [huge population losses in recent years](#).



Part of the display at the fake butterfly store at 2808 N. Milwaukee Ave.
Mina Bloom/Block Club Chicago



The third storefront installation is a fake wilderness supply shop selling genetically modified birds at 2912 N. Milwaukee Ave.

Mina Bloom/Block Club Chicago

The fake wilderness shop is at a building owned and occupied by project partner Basa. The fake shop exists in a world in which “Twitter genetically modified birds for a publicity stunt and they escaped and now they’re the standard blue bird out in the world,” Patton said.

[A 2019 study from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#) showed the United States and Canada have lost nearly 3 billion birds across all species since 1970.

The installations will remain up through the end of March. Grieshaber plans to host a talk series with Patton and Reinke in the coming months.

The pair hope to spark conversations around climate change, what happens when species go extinct and, more broadly, what the future might bring.

“I think it’s really important for people to be able to imagine the future and ... not necessarily an entirely negative way and not necessarily an entirely positive way,” Patton said. “We can have an effect on the future we want to build ... I want to empower people to think about that.”

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