



This time,

# Exhibits Newsline

presents three  
distinctive exhibitions  
from three unique  
locations in the  
United States. Enjoy!

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Paul Orselli



ARTHUR EVANS

fig. 1. A view in  
*Both Sides Now*.

Exhibition

## Both Sides Now

Institution

## Williams College Museum of Art

Location

Williamstown, Massachusetts

*Both Sides Now* is a first-time creative collaboration by sibling artists Lexa and Dan Walsh. Dan, a minimalist abstract painter, and Lexa, a socially engaged artist, come together to merge their practices around a shared interest in spectacle, perception, and encounters among objects and people. The result is a series of interactive sculptural stations—nodding to Rome’s Circus Maximus—which encourages new investigations and responses to Williams College Museum of Art’s collection (fig. 1).

In the adjacent gallery, they address their differing theories of contemporary art head-on through a series of oversized stitch-samplers featuring the artists’ ongoing, and at times contentious, call-and-response dialogue.

Lexa and Dan cross-stitched three canvases with quotations that exemplify their respective and distinct views on art. The stitch-sampler is an intimate medium historically relegated to a position of craft associated with women and girls, but also has communal and pedagogical roots. The samplers take on the monumental scale of paintings. Instead of depicting traditional ABCs, numerals, maps, and stories, they draw from texts, both obscure and iconic, by historians, theorists, and thinkers.

Through a call-and-response dialogue, Lexa and Dan challenge each other’s approaches to art and interpretation. At the same time, they call into question the sampler as a form, finding equal value among materials and media from linen to burlap and screen-printing and embroidery to puffy paint.

The sibling face-off continues in the portrait kiosk, which invites visitors to peer through the eyeholes to see four paintings: a self-portrait by each artist and an image of Lexa by Dan, and likewise one of Dan created by Lexa.

—Lexa Walsh is an artist based in Oakland, California.

Exhibition

**WONDER**

Museum

**Renwick Gallery**

Location

Washington, DC

This exhibition is one I saw in Washington, DC during the annual AAM (American Alliance of Museums) conference. In November 2015, the Renwick Gallery—home to the Smithsonian American Art Museum’s collection of contemporary craft and decorative art—opened its doors after a major, two-year renovation. To celebrate, the museum was transformed into an immersive artwork with a debut exhibition titled *WONDER*.



fig. 3. Patrick Dougherty wove monumental structures from countless tree saplings.

And a true “wonder” it is! The idea of giving over every gallery inside the Renwick to a different artist to create immersive, site-specific works was audacious, but ultimately successful (figs. 2 & 3). From the Renwick’s website ([www.renwick.americanart.si.edu/wonder](http://www.renwick.americanart.si.edu/wonder)):

Nine leading contemporary artists—Jennifer Angus, Chakaia Booker, Gabriel Dawe, Tara Donovan, Patrick Dougherty, Janet Echelman, John Grade, Maya Lin, and Leo Villareal—each took over different galleries in the building, creating site-specific installations inspired by the Renwick....

While the nine artists featured in *WONDER* create strikingly different works, they are connected by their interest in creating large-scale installations from unexpected materials. Index cards, marbles,

strips of wood—all objects so commonplace and ordinary we often overlook them—were assembled, massed, and juxtaposed to utterly transform spaces and engage us in the most surprising ways. The works are expressions of process, labor, and materials that are grounded in our everyday world, but that combine to produce awe-inspiring results.

Coupled with a strong social media push (every art installation was “selfie” or Instagram ready), the Renwick has become one of THE hot spots on the Washington museum scene.

I hope other museums take note of the success of *WONDER* at the Renwick, and that museum exhibit developers and designers find inspiration there for their own “wonderful” experiments!

—Paul Orsell



fig. 2. Gabriel Dawe hung thousands of strands of cotton embroidery thread to create what appear to be waves of color and light.

Exhibition

# Pajarito Environmental Education Center

Institution

## Los Alamos Nature Center

Location

Los Alamos, New Mexico

fig. 4.

The Los Alamos County Nature Center building.



DAWN MANGE

Known mainly for its role in the historic development of atomic weapons during the Second World War, Los Alamos, New Mexico also offers nature lovers dozens of hiking trails and breathtaking views of the northern New Mexico landscape. Here the Pajarito Plateau features a vertical mile of biodiversity in its canyons, mesas, mountains, and skies. The Pajarito Environmental Education Center at the Los Alamos Nature

Center interprets this unique configuration of natural habitats through exhibits and programs, indoors and out. The center's new building and exhibits opened on April 22, 2015 (fig. 4).

Once inside, a large topographical model of Los Alamos County greets visitors. iPads surrounding the model give visitors access to a custom mobile app, designed to encourage both new and

experienced hikers to make trips out to nearby public trails. Exhibits explore how varied elevations support distinct natural communities and allow visitors to digitally explore the five ecozones in Los Alamos County (fig. 5).

Talking rocks speak of geologic time in an audio interactive. Live and preserved specimens of flora and fauna highlight the differences in adaptations for living on north

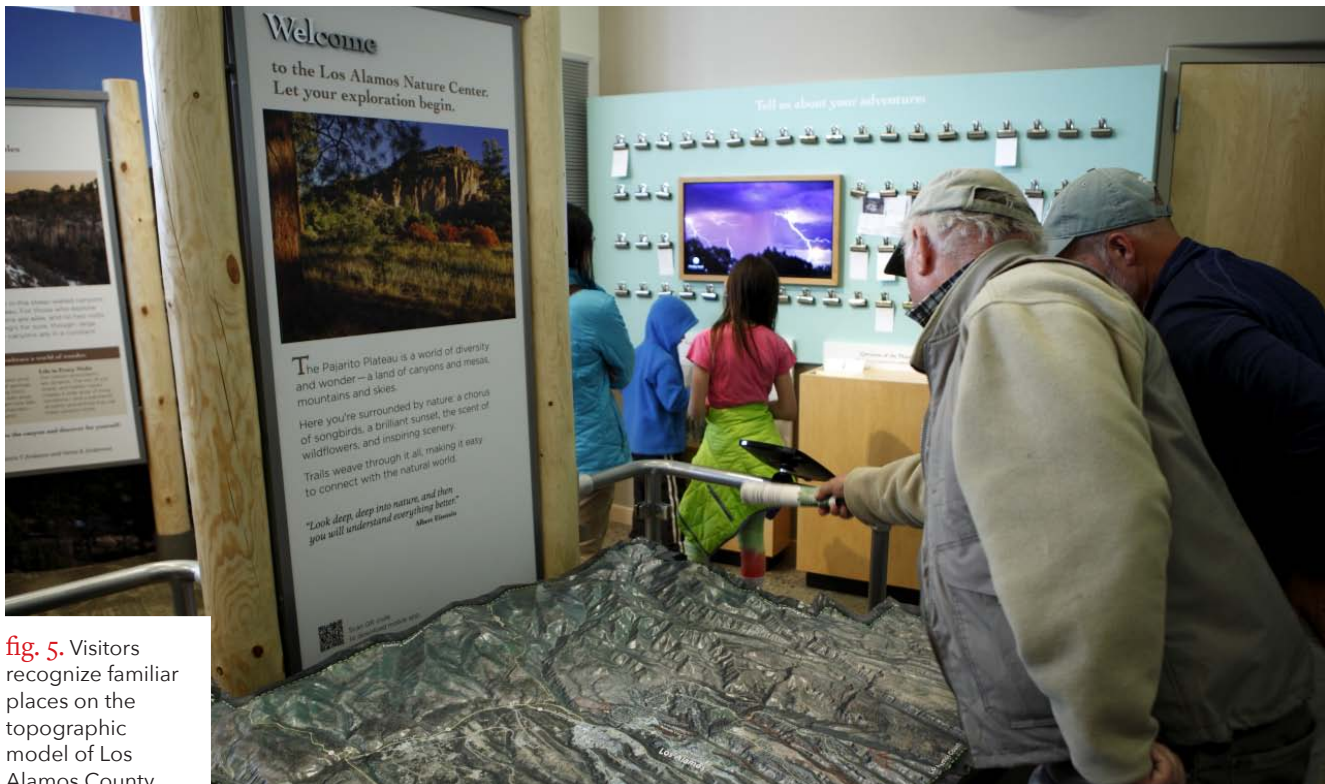


fig. 5. Visitors recognize familiar places on the topographic model of Los Alamos County.

ADDISON DOTY



fig. 6.  
View of  
the "canyons"  
exhibit area.

and south sides of canyons. Pull-out tubes, swiveling panels, and buttons reveal sounds and objects one would hear or see in a Los Alamos County canyon. A lenticular graphic illustrates the dramatic changes that can happen to a landscape when a flash flood occurs. One wall of the canyons exhibit is dominated by a 700-gallon aquarium, showcasing fish of the Rio Grande (fig. 6).

A live ant colony joins other specimens in front of a stunning photo backdrop in introducing the ecology of the high mesas. Interactive games test visitors' knowledge about bird life of the area. A brightly colored, touchable model of the Valles Caldera, accompanied by a short documentary video, illustrates the volcanic origins of the Jemez Mountains. A View-Master with a custom reel of images allows visitors to explore the night skies.

The Children's Discovery Room features a "diorama with a difference," upon which young visitors can climb and play. As children physically explore the peaks, plateaus, canyons, and crannies of the diorama, they find miniature animals and signs of

wildlife (fig. 7). They construct their own stories of predator and prey relationships, how animals raise babies, or how to build a den or nest with some of the play materials provided. A nearby puppet theater encourages them to collaborate and share their stories with others, while reading materials, puzzles, and games inspire the creative construction of experiences with friends, siblings, and caregivers.

—Andrew Merriell is the principal of the interpretive design and planning firm bearing his name, and is based in New Mexico.

fig. 7. Children play with the "diorama with a difference" in the Children's Discovery Room.



Have you seen (or helped create) an exhibition that you'd like to share with colleagues in a future Exhibits Newline column? Email me for more information on how to contribute.

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