

MEGAN GECKLER'S KALEIDESCOPE ART INVITES CLARKSVILLIANS TO PLAY

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By Karen Parr-Moody

Clarksvillians, you have been summoned to take part in an artwork that might blow your collective minds. Internationally-known artist Megan Geckler is creating a massive art installation this month at Austin Peay State University and everyone is invited to come out and play.

While many bemoan the alienating nature of technology, Geckler uses it to actively engage community members. She creates the template for her artworks and then anyone can come in and help build them.

Michael Dickens, APSU's Director of Galleries, explains how it works. "People can just show up and Megan will talk to them, get them started, hand them a staple gun. They can go to town."

The installation will be comprised of strands of colored flagging tape, a material that can be found in any hardware store.

"The total amount of strands in the APSU installation will be about

6,000, all plotted out to have a rainbow of color," Dickens says.

Geckler breaks down the entire project into basic constructions so that anyone from the community can come and help, regardless of skill or talent. And no prior art experience is necessary.

"Using computer-aided design software, I begin with a three-dimensional digital model of the building," Geckler says. "This is where I daydream and sketch out my various approaches to the installation. This 'digital sketchbook' is where the bulk of the creative process takes place."

How incredibly precise does this artwork get? Almost infinitely so.

Geckler, who works with an assistant, says, "We use coding software plug-ins to help us extrapolate the data from the model to create physical paper templates that are used during installation. From this point forward, it becomes a logistical puzzle that is broken down into a series of production

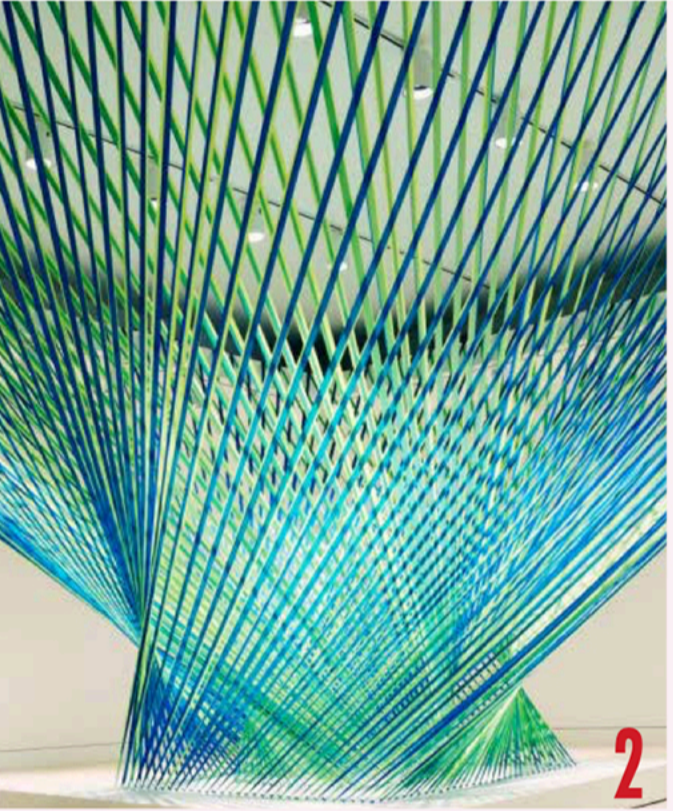
1 The installation "Believe in what you say" was created in the Sturt Haaga Gallery, in La Cañada Flintridge, California.

stages so that we can accomplish the creation of the artwork within the installation window."

Unlike conventional mediums, such as painting and sculpture, viewers are encouraged to touch and work with Geckler's art -- with nary a security guard in sight.

Clarksville locals don't need an appointment to get involved with the installation that will be going up. Geckler will be at the university from Jan. 29 through Feb. 2 and the public is invited to join in from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The installation will be produced in the atrium of the university's new Art and Design Building. It is located on Jackson Alley between Henry and 8th streets.

On Monday, Jan. 29, the artist will speak to the public in the lecture



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2 A funnel called "fill it up and pour it down the inside" is one of artist Megan Geckler's enormous and colorful art installations.

3 Megan Geckler, an artist who lives and works in living and Los Angeles, California, exhibits her work internationally and has created an installation for the new Art and Design Building at APSU.

hall that is located next to the atrium in the Art and Design Building. And on Thursday, Feb. 2, those who attend the First Thursday Art Walk from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. are invited to help produce the installation at the university as part of the social engagement.

Geckler's medium of flagging tape is typically used on construction sites to demarcate certain areas. Each ribbon is about 16 feet long.

Geckler says, "I prefer to use a common, everyday materials. By elevating them into a fine art environment, it gives them a second life."

Community engagement is at the heart of Geckler's work.

"She works in public spaces, because it's the public's space," Dickens says. "So they're involved. And if you can get the public involved in your projects in the public space, they understand it more. It opens



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up the art world to the public, who would normally pass by and say, 'What is this?' Now they have a concept of what it is and can tell their friends and community members and get them involved. It's a way to use public art for community engagement, rather than just plopping it down."

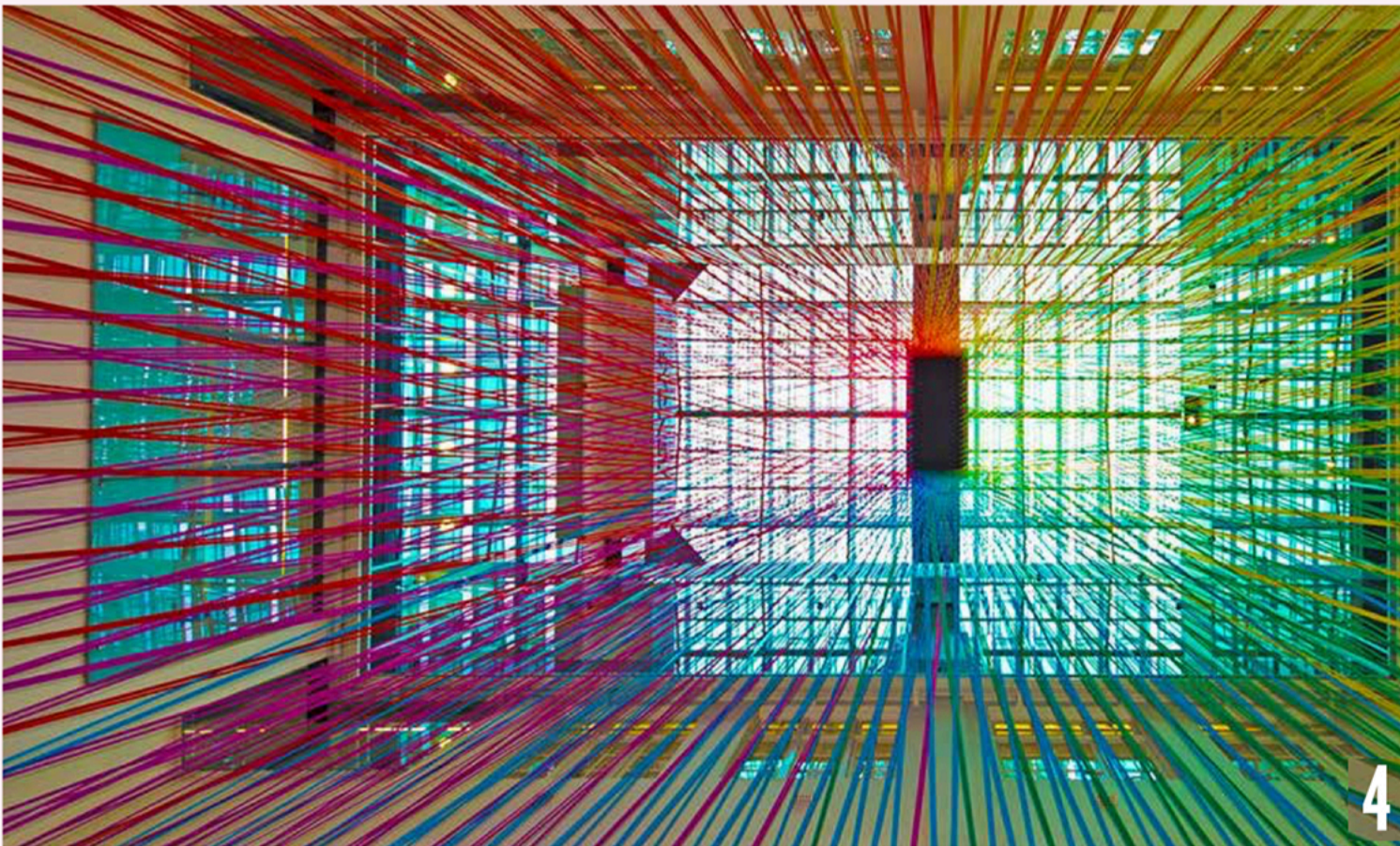
This emerging field of modern art is called interactive installation; it is a subcategory of installation art. A sense of inclusivity makes this movement spirited and creative, akin to children working on an art project in school. Both artists and those experiencing each artistic piece, as it is brought to life, find that this participation channels the fun-filled experience of their youth.

Geckler discovered flagging tape in 1999 in a hardware store in L.A., where she was pursuing a master's of fine art in sculpture. Because the tape is available in a wide of cheery colors, Geckler is able to create grand kaleidoscopes of shades for her installations.

She described it best in a profile in Oprah magazine: "Imagine living in the movie 'Tron' and being on acid."

Dickens describes how he anticipates the final installation to appear. "The strands of tape will be hanging in such a way that, when you are approaching from the street, you will see the color but you will also be able to look through the building."

Approaching from one angle, the color will look solid,



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4 The title "A million things that make your head spin" is apt for all of Megan Geckler's art, which is truly mind-bending.

from patterns your parents designed," which was installed in the Los Angeles Municipal Gallery of Los Angeles, California, and "Rewritten by machine on new technology," which was installed in the Lancaster Museum of Art and History, in Lancaster, California.

When she arrives in Clarksville armed with multi-colored tape, Geckler will be ushering a new form of art into the local mix. Dickens says the exhibit will remain in place until the flagging tape gives out. It has a lifespan, after all, but while it's in Geckler's hands, it's a fabulous life.

whereas approaching from another angle it will reveal slats of light between the ribbons.

"It's designed specifically for the new space," he adds, referring to the sophisticated new Art & Design Building.

The process of producing such an installation can be physically demanding.

"We are often standing with our arms above our heads for days on end," Geckler says. "At the same time, it is also very relaxing to create at times due to the repetitive nature of the process. It becomes akin to a sewing circle where people are creating something together, but are also able to switch their brains off and let their hands do the work. This essentially helps to build a community on site where people make new

friends and are a part of something (literally) bigger than ourselves."

Together, Geckler and Dickens came up with the notion of asking the community to physically assist with the installation.

"I find this idea compelling and fascinating, Geckler says.

During her career, Geckler has produced such installations on a massive scale. Her largest artwork was entitled "A million things that make your head spin" included 33,000 feet of flagging tape.

Her favorite works of her own are "Your escape