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Stacie Birky Greene: Balboa Park as Terra Incognita

Written by
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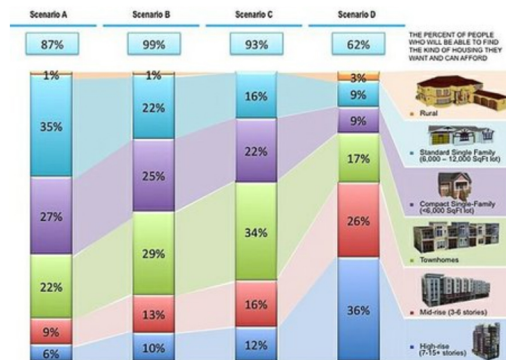
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Planning for *Balboa Park's Centennial Celebration* in 2015 is underway. At the same time, there are continued discussions about designs for the park (pedestrian walkways, parking and the like). Conversations about major makeovers both [pro](#) and [con](#).

And the *San Diego Foundation* is surveying the wider *community* about a variety of visions for San Diego's future -- from letting growth continue as is to a fairly cloistered model of density lifestyles.

A planner's vision, using a survey, might portray one of the community elements (such as housing futures) like this:



Interim survey results the San Diego Foundation's Vision study. This screen shot is about housing preferences from single family to high density apartment dwellings. Results from the San Diego Foundation's study will be reported as news items in the not to distant future.

But what about an artist's vision for change or about how we might understand what a city park is really about? Are such artist visions different from city planners, social engineers, community advocates and politicians?

I can't speak for all artists but there might be a different mindset - not *better*, just different. Imagine a Salvador Dali offering a surreal vision of San Diego, or of Balboa Park! Imagine an Op Artist's rendering! Artists generally march to the tune of a different drummer rather than being in step with the practicalities of the moment.

I offered my own vision of a [sustainable Balboa Park](#) in an earlier essay.

When I spoke with [Stacie Birky Greene](#), I was drawn to her installation, *Terra Incognita*, drawing her inspiration from Balboa Park. Birky's vision, and my own, are quirky challenges to the pragmatics of city planning - more about pushing the conceptual envelope than finding the best place to park one's car.

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What is *Terra Incognita* and how does it relate to Balboa Park?

Stacie Birky Greene: I began with the idea of San Diego's Balboa Park, not as a literal representation but as a starting point. In this version of Balboa Park, human activity remakes the natural landscape; the residue are roads that go nowhere and letters are seen in the hand-made paper but the sources are no longer there.

For the *kirigami* I used such things as weight loss surgery advertisements and political campaign mailers. I used spent fax ribbon to make the *roads* and my hand-made paper came from laundry lint and shredded documents.



This installation is a metaphor for the viewer to rethink what a park is - is it really known or is it unknown, a terra incognita? For me, junk, trash and other unwanted material are recontextualized into intricate and delicate forms - a new nature that draws on our wish to balance the ecology. In effect, a return to a natural state.



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Terra Incognita is an unconventional view of landscape art using a three-dimensional installation. There is a base of upholstery foam that I carved to show the topography of canyons and mesas. This is the topographical map.



This image focuses in on the Hwy 163 corridor. When we first moved to San Diego 16 years ago this drive going under the Laurel Street bridge always felt magical to me. Especially when the bridge's archways were covered with vines, it was and still is one of my favorite places to drive though.

Terra Incognita was at Artifact Studio in South Park and ran from December 3, 2011 to January 7, 2012.

Will there be more Terras?

SBG: I hope to create more *Terras* and expand on this one. I'm currently looking for venues for that purpose.

All photos by Stacy Birky Greene



This image is a detail of Terra Incognita - my topographical representation of Balboa Park - focusing on Florida Canyon and the Prado. The paper flowers on the left are resting where the museums and Organ Pavilion are located.

I put handmade paper on the top of the plateaus re-using junk mail. Hanging above the plateau are kirigami flowers and butterflies, as well as lying on the top of the base. I used junk mail and discarded proofs from a recent musical score composed by my husband, Adam Greene, to make the kirigami.

*Why use Balboa Park for your re-imagined natural environment?**

SBG: I've worked with nature concepts before with plants and animals but *Terra Incognita* works with a broader environmental context. Balboa Park, of course, makes this installation personal. I live close to Balboa Park, it is my backyard. However, the degree to which the piece abstracts the specific forms and components of the park should indicate that the emphasis is on process and materials, with the park providing a useful context in which to contemplate their implications.