

Kal Spelletich

BENICIA HERALD

In Residence: S.F.-based artist creates interactive Benicia exhibit

By Keri Luiz, Assistant Editor

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It was happenstance — “a whim” — that led San Francisco-based Kal Spelletich to apply to be Arts Benicia’s 2013 “Artist in Residence.”

The ABaIR project gives artists working in the field of site-specific installation the opportunity to enjoy extended time in a gallery space. Spelletich, who has shown his work from Leipzig, Germany to Oakland, said his application to the ABaIR program was unplanned.

“This email came across my computer that said to send a proposal. I tend to get a lot of those. Often I have a lot of shows, or I’m busy and don’t have time to fill out applications,” he said.

“But it was, ‘Benicia. I like that section of the North Bay.’ On a whim I filled it out. I had some ideas I wanted to work out that weren’t applicable to the exhibits I am getting these days.

“I think this is a chance to do that, kind of a challenge to address a community I don’t know anything about. And I don’t know anyone.” There are two phases to ABaIR. The first, the “installation and residency phase” gave the public the opportunity to observe the artist at work. That phase ended July 28.



Today is the first day of the exhibition phase, where the public can view the finished installation. An opening reception is Saturday.

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Spelletich's exhibit, "Morning Glory," involves robotics, sensors, video and audio, as well as still photography and drawings, put together as a functioning composition using technology, locally sourced materials and found objects.

Its title comes from the profusion of flowers that adorn the area in front of the Arts Benicia building in the Arsenal.



"Part of my proposal was my interpretation of what I am seeing (in the Arsenal)," Spelletich said. "It's been fun, and a challenge, and confusing, and exciting. I guess that is what keeps art interesting to me."

"I found a bunch of stuff around the neighborhood. I'm doing an homage to the vine up front, those morning glory vines which are often considered invasive," he said. "But they're so great, and beautiful."

"I rigged up my version of a vine (a cable stretched across the room), and attached a robotic arm to it with a sensor that reads your aura, and it plays the vine."

Every sculpture in the exhibit, in fact, is interactive in one form or another.

After spending time on the Arts Benicia building's front patio, Spelletich hooked up a wind sensor there; when the wind blows, it triggers one of the sculptures inside the gallery.

"It is sort of a way to visualize the wind, and also to do something with the wind blowing," he said. "I titled that piece, 'Our Friend The Wind.'"

"Every day I've just hung out on that patio. People come by. It's pretty special."

Another of the pieces was something that came “out of the blue” — video interviews of dozens of local people “looking positively toward the future.” Four different videos, featuring six people per video, will be featured on four monitors, all playing at once. “I was curious if I could capture that collective positive energy from the community,” Spelletich said.

“This is maybe my favorite thing that has come out of the project. I’m a bit of a news junkie, and you just burn out on it after a while. I kind of give up. I failed ... on my watch things are just getting worse it appears.



“I’m trying to do something hopeful and positive and constructive. As far as art goes, I always think of art as a positive gesture from and for society.”

And while some of his work may challenge, there is a “traditional” aspect, too. “I am trying to challenge myself, and not just do stuff I’ve already seen. On the flip side of that, I’ve made some drawings of the morning glories. That’s not exactly crazy or radical,” he said. “I also ended up with nine photographs of the morning glories that I have in the exhibit. That’s not exactly crazy, either.

“It’s quite traditional, classical, beautiful work. But another way for me to add challenge is to interpret the concept. I always love doing that. Trying to interpret a concept with multiple mediums.”