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## Not your usual white elephant

by Marilyn McMahon | October 2, 2021 | 0 comment

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October 5, 2021

### Inflatable pachyderm to pack trunk for sojourn's end



COURTESY PHOTOS

A huge white elephant, who's a big fan of cultural sites, has been traveling around to Santa Barbara locations such as The Granada during the "Light Elephant Santa Barbara 2020-2021" project.

Ask most people about the meaning of the well-known phrase, "Elephant in the room," and most will respond, "An obvious problem is being ignored."

When a huge white elephant mysteriously appeared around Santa Barbara this past month in 15 different locations, most curious onlookers had another question: "What's the story of the elephant?"



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According to Iman Djouni and Jonathan Taube, creators of the project, “Light Elephant Santa Barbara 2020-2021,” the artwork “deploys an enigma appearing in the backgrounds of familiar places and historic passages, moving through the downtown like a flaneur in public space. Its presence provokes three simple questions: “What has happened here?” “What is happening here?” and “What will happen here?”



At left, the elephant visits Paseo Nuevo and stands near the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara, where a family friendly workshop related to the elephant project is scheduled for today. Standing on the steps are Iman Djouni and Jonathan Taube, creators of “Light Elephant Santa Barbara 2020-2021.” At right, the elephant, who happens to be very well-read, visits the Central Library.

The Light Elephant’s journey around town will culminate this weekend at the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara in Paseo Nuevo with a family friendly workshop from 1 to 4 p.m. today and a poster making workshop there from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. Participants will be provided materials to make posters to hang in the gallery.

Ms. Djouni, an assistant teaching professor at UCSB’s College of Creative Studies and Department of Art, and her partner, Mr. Taube, an architectural designer, introduced the elephant in 2017 as part of a community project in Baltimore.



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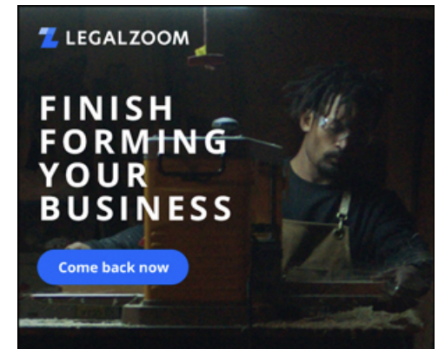
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During this past summer, the couple directed a team of UCSB students to install the large-scale public artwork in dozens of sites in town. Among them were multiple places on State Street, the Lobero and Granada theatres, Alameda Park, Santa Barbara Public Library, Chase Palm Park and Santa Barbara Historical Museum.

Made of white nylon fabric, the elephant is 16 feet tall, 12 feet wide and 20 feet long.

“We had it digitally fabricated from a computer model of an elephant that we provided to the manufacturer,” Mr. Taube told the News-Press. “The manufacturer made it to our specs using software to make the pattern that was cut by a plotter and then sewn together.”



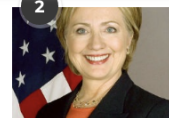
At left, Iman Djouni and Jonathan Taube, creators of “Light Elephant Santa Barbara 2020-2021,” spend time with their creation. At right, the elephant had some business at the Santa Barbara County Courthouse.

The elephant was conceived to be a temporary public artwork that could be easily packed, transported and displayed in various locations.

“We had permits for the installations to be in each location for about two to three hours. We did multiple locations per day and made periodic pop-ups,” said Mr. Taube, adding that they have installed it “in many situations, from upside down in galleries to rooftops. It weighs about 50 pounds, packs in a bag/sack and takes about 15 minutes to inflate.

“For our installations, we power the inflatable sculpture with permission from neighbors/ location partners, or we use a marine deep cell battery. There are no problems transporting it by design. Its appearance and disappearance are meant to be low or no-touch to the sites. We use a variety of straps or sandbags to secure it depending on what the situation requires. We once floated it on a raft on a lake for a week.

“We had many requests to know where the elephant would be next and fans that saw the ‘pop-up’ in multiple locations following clues that we teased in the social media campaign.”



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Ms. Djouni and Mr. Taube have partnered for the past decade to work in public spaces and on public issues. They have conducted research and produced artworks in public in Avignon, France; Rotterdam, The Netherlands; Israel; along the U.S./Mexico border; Baltimore and New Orleans.



At left, the elephant explores De la Guerra Plaza. At right, the elephant stops by the A.C. Postel Mission Rose Garden.

Ms. Djouni earned her bachelor's degree from the Maryland Institute College of Art and her master of fine arts degree in printmaking from Tulane University.

Mr. Taube earned his bachelors' degree from the Maryland Institute College of Art and his master's degree at Tulane School of Architecture. Their creative practice is at the intersections of expanded print media, urban theory and public processes.

"The pandemic changed everything. However, it has revealed the dynamic aspects of public life and our public spaces in light of the situation. How we perform/ behave in and how we use public spaces is not fixed, but ever evolving," Mr. Taube told the News-Press. "Research and planning for this project in the summer of 2020 revealed how public life adapted and made new use of public spaces in response to COVID-19.

"From yoga in Casa de la Guerra to a melange of architectural 'parklets' for outdoor dining on State Street, local businesses and cultural institutions impacted by the pandemic found relief from expanding novel pedestrian uses of State Street and iconic and historical sites in Santa Barbara."

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