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Bunny Rabbit Art Challenge aims to lift spirits with open-air gallery in Boulder

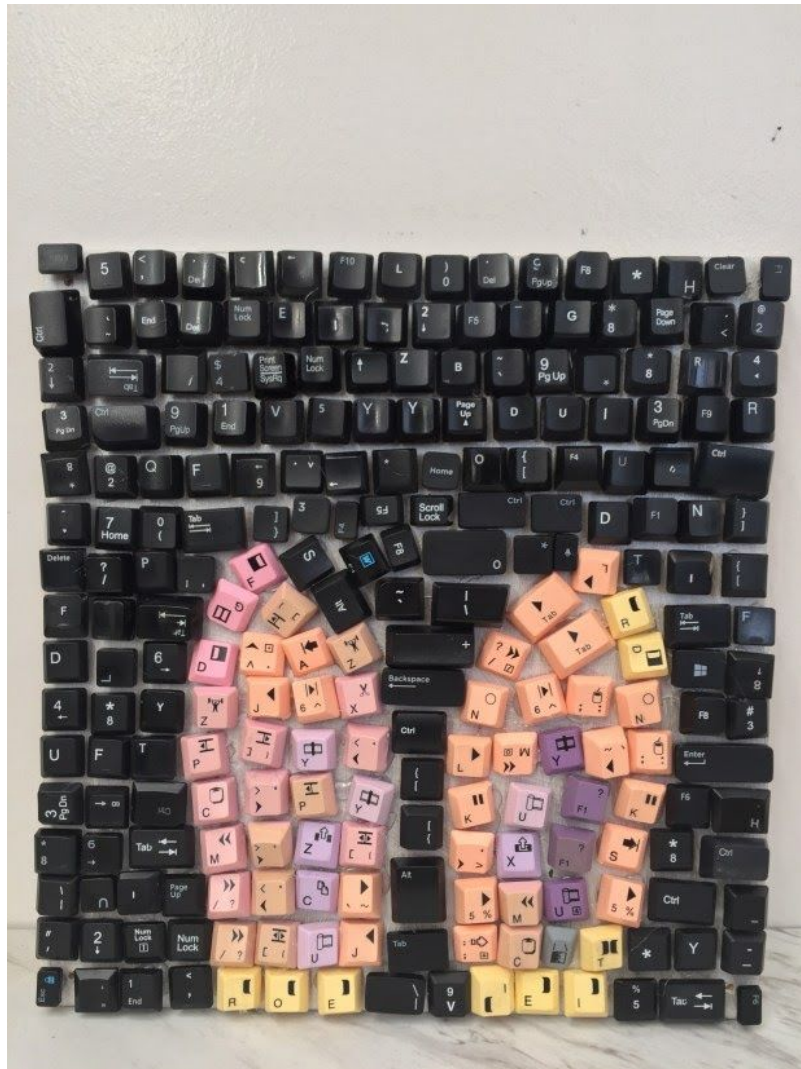
Organized by Creative Catalyzers, the project kicks off on Earth Day and features work from 30 artists



Artist Jeanne Kipke's piece for The Boulder Bunny Rabbit Art Challenge. The open-air gallery, stretching throughout Boulder, will feature work from 30 artists. (Jeanne Kipke/ Courtesy photo)

By [KALENE MCCORT](#) | kmccort@prairiemountainmedia.com | Boulder Daily Camera
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Easter may have passed, but bunny sightings will soon take over Boulder. [Creative Catalyzers](#), a nonprofit cultural leadership organization, has called on 30 local artists to provide pieces for The Boulder Bunny Rabbit Art Challenge — a wide-ranging open-air gallery that will be popping up throughout central Boulder.



Angie Eng's entry for The Boulder Bunny Rabbit Art Challenge, an open-air gallery throughout Boulder. (Angie Eng/ Courtesy photo)

These offerings go far beyond what one thinks when they hear the words “Peter Cottontail.” From intriguing mixed-media pieces to vibrant paintings, the work ranges from abstract to whimsical, from thought-provoking to complex.

“The idea was to bring smiles as we acknowledged the collective worry, sadness, anxiety and fear,” said co-organizer and director of Creative Catalyzers, Angie Eng. Eng implemented the project with Peter Vitale, Creative Catalyzers’ leader and business real-estate developer, and architect and designer Jamie Wirkler. “Since we are in the business of art, a community public art action of small works was a good fit for the situation.” Vitale came up with the public art concept the day after Colorado’s first COVID-19 death. Later, Eng selected the concept of “bunnies,” with springtime and new beginnings in mind.



Jane Glotzer's mosaic will be a part of The Boulder Bunny Rabbit Art Challenge. (Jane Glotzer/
Courtesy photo)

“The contrast of bunnies and COVID seems awkward, but actually makes total sense when a feeling of helplessness is overwhelming,” Eng said. “An analogy would be Keith Haring’s colorful painted outlines of dancing people that he graffitied all over NYC during the AIDS epidemic.”

Initially, Eng had her doubts about the number of submissions she would receive. Eng said she contacted artists directly, combed through local art organizations and sought out artists who participated in Boulder Arts Week. “Before I knew it, I had over 25 artists making rabbits out of feathers, mosaic, paint, collage, recycled materials and electronics,” Eng said.

The diverse pieces will hit the Boulder streets on Wednesday, which is Earth Day. Passersby, out for a quick jaunt with their dog or on their way to pick up food, can search for the pieces in alleyways, sides of buildings, way up high or down near the ground. They will be positioned in not-so-obvious places to keep spontaneity thriving.

“Angie Eng reached out asking me if I’d like to participate in the project,” said Nikita Coulombe. “I loved the idea of 30 artists making 12-by-12 inch rabbit-themed pieces to be displayed around Pearl Street, almost like a community Easter egg hunt, and immediately told her to count me in.”



Nikita Coulombe's "Bunny Love" will be a part of The Boulder Bunny Rabbit Art Challenge. (Nikita Coulombe/ Courtesy photo)

Permission to hang the work still has to be given by various building owners and tenants. Stephen Tebo, of Tebo Development, Boulder's largest commercial real estate companies, is one of the first community leaders being approached to support the project.

"I've been working on a series of abstract paintings that contain just one line," Coulombe said. "Recently, I've created several 'one-liner' animals and I thought there was an opportunity here to do something playful in that style. Of course, it's not only Easter, it's also spring ... The bunnies are multiplying. Kind of like in my piece."

Admirers of Coulombe's piece "[Bunny Love](#)" can order it as a print or on a mug, tote bag or even phone case through her website. While some participants constructed somewhat conceptual pieces, one viewed her own pet as a muse.

"The process of creating this piece was a great experience," said 11-year-old Crest View Elementary fifth-grader Mary Mueh. "I started off taking a picture of my rabbit, April, and I traced and played with her shape on some drawing apps. I decided to go with a colorful spring-like bunny. It took a lot of layers of paint and planning to get it just the way I wanted it."

One of the younger participants, Mueh is hoping her piece brings a sense of lighthearted whimsy to viewers.



Mary Mueh, 11, has crafted a piece inspired by her own pet rabbit as part of The Boulder Bunny Rabbit Art Challenge. (Mary Mueh/ Courtesy photo)

“I thought that in this hard time, we need something to really brighten up our days,” Mueh said, in response to why she’s participating in the challenge. “Sharing my art with everybody seemed like the perfect way to do this. My rabbit inspires me and makes me happy already, so I thought that maybe she could do so for others too.”

For some, their art was inspired by the uncertainty and heaviness of dealing with a global health crisis.

“I wanted to speak to the immense grief that we are all experiencing,” said Joy Redstone, director of Naropa Community Counseling. “I believe that we are collectively grieving and that in art we can find ways to speak to the scared, uncertain, sad parts that we all share. Art for me is crucial in these uncertain times. I need something bigger than words to speak my feelings. I need to make art to speak to the losses that we are all sharing. I find that others’ art lifts my spirits and makes me feel in community with people when I am otherwise feeling very alone — as we all are.”

Redstone, who often crafts pieces from found objects, views creating art as a powerful healing process.



Joy Redstone's mixed-media piece for The Boulder Bunny Rabbit Art Challenge features a geode in the center. (Joy Redstone/ Courtesy photo)

"Thinking about people dying alone was what inspired the piece," Redstone said. "I have experienced a lot of loss in my life, and one of my deepest regrets has been not being present when I lose someone. In one of my first jobs, doing mental health in a prison, I would volunteer to sit with someone as they passed. I believe it is a sacred moment that no one should have to experience alone." Hearing of people succumbing to coronavirus is what prompted Redstone to craft this piece. "Reading the news stories about people dying on the ventilators without their family being present is so heartbreaking to me," Redstone said. "So, in my piece, the little rabbit is riding a geode towards the spirit world." "Unlike some industries, the visual and auditory nature of art means artists and galleries are able to share much of their work online," Coulombe said. "However, nothing can replace the visceral experience of interacting with art in person. These last few weeks have been some of my most productive and I'm remaining optimistic that once social distancing ends people will come back and support the arts."

The "Bunny" pieces will be on display until September. "From this modest community public art action emerged the idea of making an open-air gallery that

rotates 12-by-12 inch art works every year,” Eng said. “So we are excited to develop this project into an ongoing cultural city space and tourist attraction for Boulder.”