

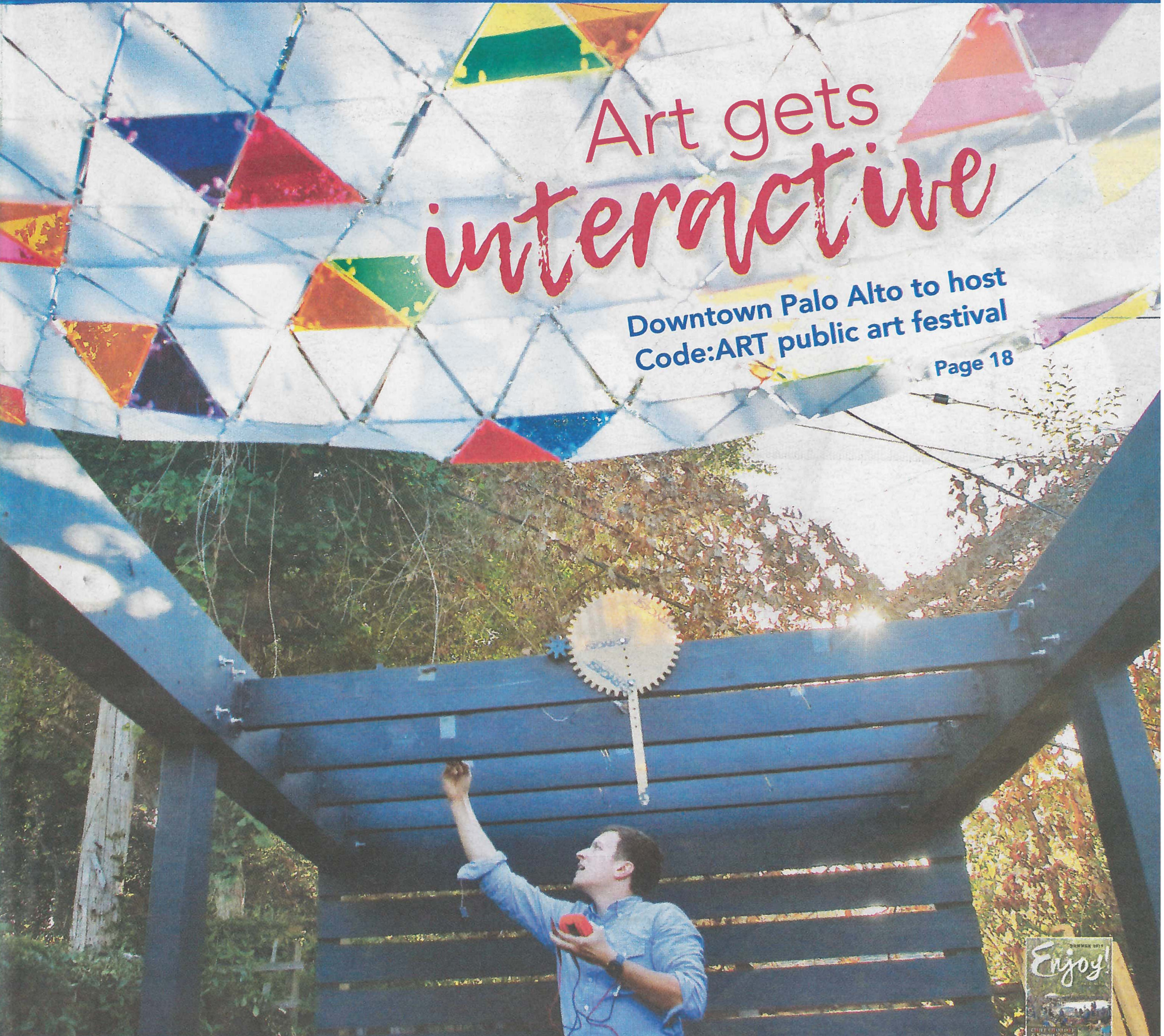
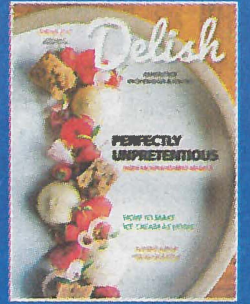
Palo Alto

# Weekly

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INSIDE

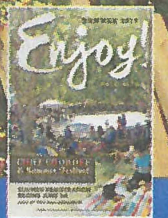
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## Art gets interactive

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# Arts & Entertainment

A weekly guide to music, theater, art, culture, books and more, edited by Karla Kane

## Public art gets interactive

Palo Alto's alleyways and plazas to host three-day art fest

by Karla Kane

Activated alleyways, a sensory garden, a murmur wall and a cave of wonders, among other attractions, will emerge in downtown Palo Alto June 1-3, when the city hosts its first Code:ART festival.

The event includes seven "urban interventions" that will be on site for the three-day duration and one longer-term temporary artwork, "Murmur Wall," which will remain in place at King Plaza through the summer and early autumn.

According to Palo Alto Public Art Program Director Elise DeMarzo, the idea for Code:ART came from the outreach efforts conducted during the city's Public Art Master Plan formulation last year. She said that while Palo Alto's population swells during business hours as commuters, Stanford University affiliates and city-based employees flock downtown, these non-residents, "felt a little disconnected from the actual community." The Public Art Program has been dedicated to trying out new-media and interactive public art installations, especially in King

Plaza, in hopes of engaging these passersby, as well as residents.

"We were hearing from the city council that they would like these people to participate, but they aren't going to come to city council meetings. We wanted to work out a way to engage that brain trust, animating these underutilized spaces," DeMarzo said. So a committee was formed and a request for proposals put out, inviting artists and community members to come up with ideas to transform the alleyways and plazas of downtown into a temporary laboratory for playful experimentation and interactive works of art.

"What we really hoped for is diversity of applications," said DeMarzo said — and she was not disappointed. Thirty-seven individuals and groups, ranging from Palo Alto high school and Stanford students, to local businesspeople, to San Francisco artists applied. "We were just thrilled with the response," DeMarzo said. "I only wish we had the space and the funding to do them all."

The city applied for and received an Artworks grant from

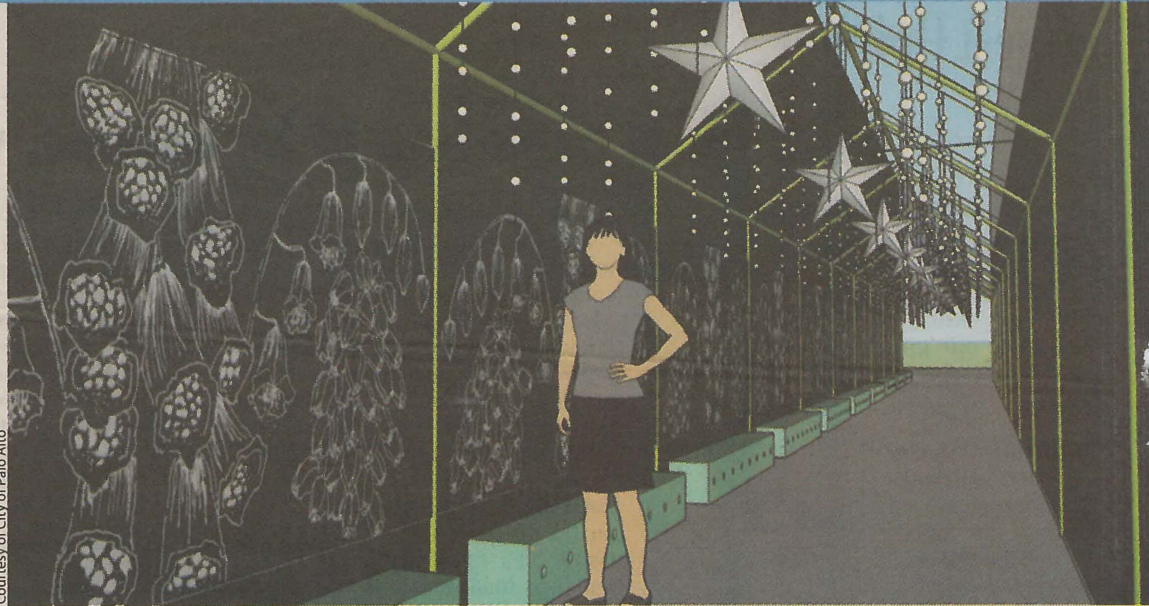
the National Endowment for the Arts, and additional support has come from Palo Alto company Houzz and others, forming a public-private partnership. During the festival, volunteers will help answer questions from the public, assist with setup and breakdown and conduct surveys.

The winning proposals include "Sensory Garden," which will be located in the alleyway between Bell's Books and Mac's Smoke Shop on Emerson Street. Designed by Elaine Ung, Sandra Slater and Megan Stevens, the installation plays off the names of the two businesses it's wedged between. Footsteps will trigger bell-like chimes, while a scent installation will offer a whiff of flowers. Dangling lights overhead and a mural also will be present to take visitors' minds off the dumpsters, abandoned payphones and other unsavory connotations one might have with an urban alley.

"The idea is to create a kind-of calming space that refocuses and re-grounds you, to hear the chimes and bells and smell the flowers and the pleasantness," Ung said, citing Mitchell Park's Magical Bridge playground and Stanford's Windhover Pavilion as inspirations. Ung, a local architect, called the installation a "dream project."

"We're all really committed to transforming public spaces into comfortable spaces for people," she said of her team members, noting that Stevens has been involved with the Palo Alto Children's Theatre and Teen Art Council, and has created colorful murals and painted utility boxes recently in Redwood City.

Over at Lytton Plaza, the "Caustic Chasm" installation will feature a simulation of the ways in which water and light interact, inspired by geometric voronoi cells. The ever-changing, brilliant light effect is designed to resemble a glittering "cave of wonders."



Courtesy of City of Palo Alto

"Sensory Garden" will offer a feast for the senses, with visual, audio and olfactory elements.



Courtesy of City of Palo Alto

Artists Elaine Ung, Sandra Slater and Megan Stevens begin work on "Sensory Garden" in the alley between Bell's Books and Mac's Smoke Shop.

"We started out thinking about what are called caustic patterns; when light is refracted by moving water, you get these amazing light patterns," co-creator Danielle Asptiz (along with Autumn Austin and Devon Myers) said. "We're still experimenting with dichroic film (a shimmering, colorful material used to decorate glass)," she said. "The wind and sunshine will cast different colors and shadows, and when it moves it's sort of similar to water moving. We started being fascinated with water and now it's sort of biomimicry."

Asptiz, a Gunn High School graduate who grew up in Los Altos Hills, like Ung, has a background in architecture, and said

she first tried her hand at public-art installation at San Francisco's Market Street Prototyping Festival (which DeMarzo also cited as an inspiration for Code:ART). While Asptiz has more experience in design, "I really fell in love with the fabrication side of things," she said.

Palo Alto Architectural Review Board member Kyu Kim and partner Hanna Joo are creating a "Pavilion" with an environmentally-friendly focus in the lane adjacent to the former site of Bon Vivant, working in partnership with GreenWaste of Palo Alto. Their piece will be made out of the familiar blue recycling "buddy bins" used by the city.

### CODE: ART Installations



The Code:ART festival will feature eight installations around downtown Palo Alto.

“We want not only to create an architectural form and space, but we also want to inform the public on recycling and doing our part to keep landfills from filling up more quickly than they have to,” Joo said. “We will also be giving away the bins on the last day of the installation so that local households and businesses can do their part to reduce, reuse and recycle.”

DeMarzo named East Palo Alto artist Ben Flatau’s “Ghost in the Machine,” on University Avenue — which consists of overhead, interactive moving “clouds” — as one of the projects she and the selection committee were most excited about.

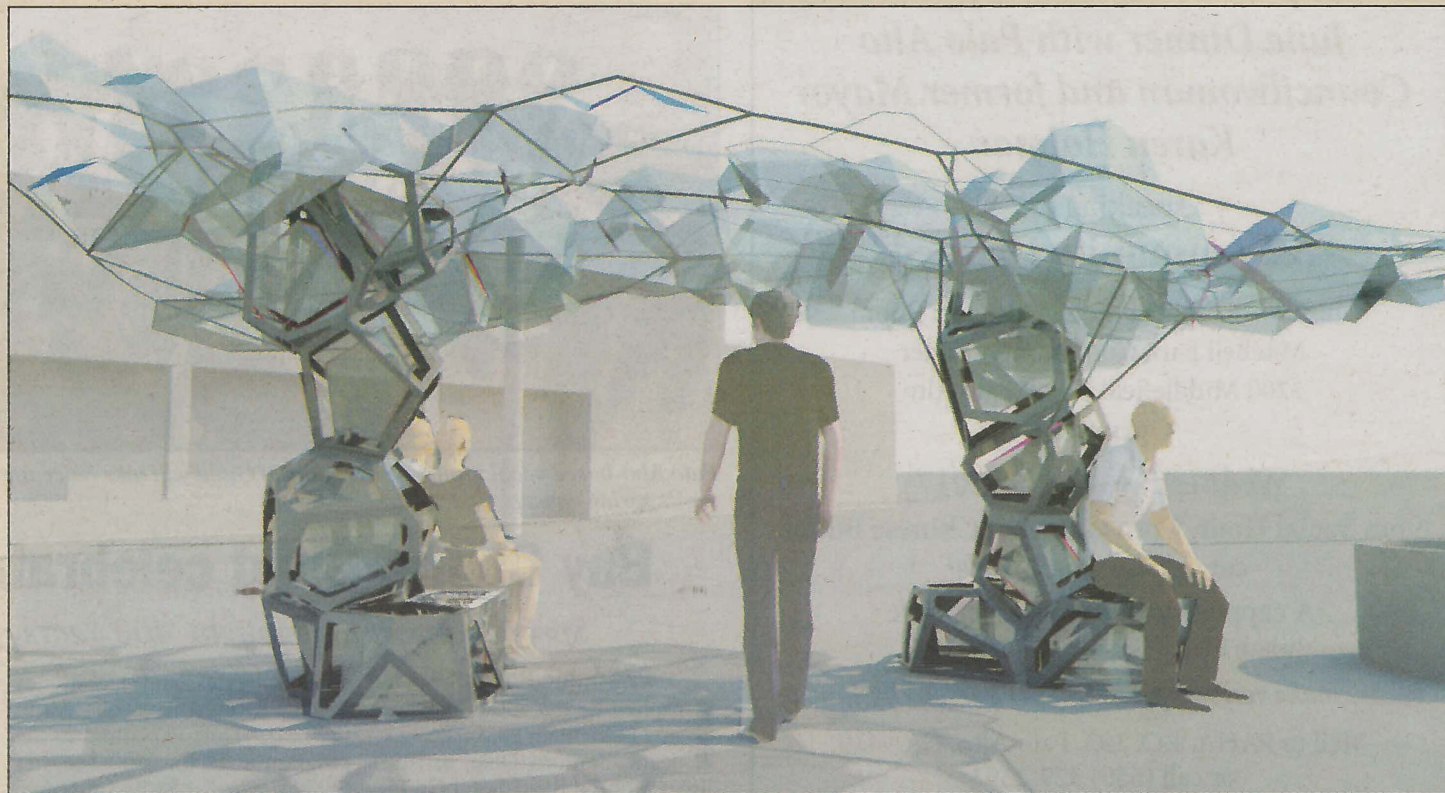
“Another one that I think will be really fun offers opportunities for spontaneous interaction between strangers,” she said, referring to King Plaza’s “Safe and Sound,” by Tomo Saito. “Safe and Sound” invites passersby to sit down on one of eight chairs, each of which is connected to a track of music, which is triggered by the sitting. When all eight chairs are filled, the full musical composition can be heard.

“Murmur Wall,” by San Francisco design group Future Cities Lab, will remain at King Plaza until October. The wall, a lattice made of stainless steel, LED lights and screens, wired to the Internet, aggregates trending search terms from within a half-mile radius and displays them, serving as a window into the city’s mood and interests at any given time. People can also — either on-site or remotely (at murmurwall.net) — type messages (or “whispers”), which are displayed on the wall briefly, then “disappear into the ether” (the information is not saved or stored).

“The work that Future Cities Lab does is interested in the relationship between the things that we build and their surrounding environments,” co-founder Nataly Gattegno said. “These installations essentially become a barometer of current events.” One iteration of “Murmur Wall” has been installed in San Francisco for the past few years, where Gattegno said the flurry of pre- and post-election messages made for interesting reading. She said Palo Alto was a great fit for the project, not just because of the city’s tech connotations but because of the very public nature of the King’s Plaza setting. “We’ve been really interested to give people the ability to use the wall almost in a sense of urban graffiti,” she said. “It will be interesting to see how this registers.”

For DeMarzo and the Public Art Program, Code:ART is not only a fun way to bring art to downtown, but also as a pilot for potential future installations and events.

“This was intended to dip our toe in the water into this kind of creative placemaking, to find out what do people like or dislike, are there elements that we might want to think about integrating into our future plans downtown, or do we think about this as a



“Caustic Chasm,” seen here in a rendering, is inspired by the interplay between light and water.

Courtesy of City of Palo Alto

festival that we think about doing every two years?” she said. This year’s festival will kick off with a panel discussion, titled “Artists as Futurists,” held at the Institute for the Future, featuring Stanford Vice President for the Arts Matthew Tiews and Palo Alto City Manager Jim Keene, among others, discussing the role of artists in shaping the future of the community.

“It’s not just that we want to have a three-day fun festival, we’re trying to learn as much as we can and put that knowledge to use,” DeMarzo said. “We really are trying to offer diversity of public art. We like our beautiful sculptural objects, but we also want to offer new ways to bring the community together; having more interactive artwork will help with that.” ■

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**What:** Code:ART

**Where:** Downtown Palo Alto (see online for map and guide to installation locations)

**When:** June 1-3; 1:30-9 p.m. on Thursday; 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Friday and Saturday. A panel discussion will take place at Institute for the Future (201 Hamilton Ave.) on June 1, noon-1:30 p.m.

**Cost:** Free

**Info:** Go to [cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/csd/public\\_art/codeart.asp](http://cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/csd/public_art/codeart.asp)

**About the cover:** Artist Ben Flatau tests the mechanics of his installation, “Ghost in the Machine” outside his studio. The piece will feature two “clouds” that billow up and down when users move in front of sensors located on the opposite sides of the clouds. Photo by Veronica Weber.



Ben Flatau assembles his “Ghost in the Machine” installation at his East Palo Alto studio.

Veronica Weber



“Murmur Wall,” seen here installed in San Francisco, pulls search results from within a half-mile radius.

Courtesy of Future Cities Lab