

By Felicity Guajardo

Blog Content Contributor

In preparation for the total solar eclipse taking place on Monday, April 8th, 2024, the San Marcos Art Commission is presenting an immersive art installation titled “Alignmentality” April 6th and April 7th from 8 p.m. -10 p.m. at the Historic Hays County Courthouse. The installation was in collaboration with local artists Alicia Philley, Topher Sipes and Jasna Boudard to honor the eclipse and the San Marcos River.

An indoor installation will also be available for daytime viewing at MotherShip Studios as part of the San Marcos Studio Tour April 5th to April 7th from 12 p.m. – 6 p.m.

A total solar eclipse occurs when the Moon passes between the Sun and Earth and completely covers the face of the Sun. This causes the sky to darken and show only the most outer layer of the Sun, the corona. The previous total solar eclipse occurred in 2017 and the next one is not predicted to happen until 2044, according to NASA Science. The upcoming total solar eclipse will pass over Mexico, the U.S. and Canada.

Alicia Philley, multimedia color-based artist, is known for using nature and the environment as inspiration for her artwork. She has stayed true to theme as five of her paintings, featuring elements of water, are the basis of “Alignmentality” and have been taken to another level as animated, virtual reality projections mimicking the San Marcos River and other elements of nature.

“As soon as we started talking about it [Alignmentality] highlighting the river as well as you know how we link it to the eclipse, I just instantly thought of that one [painting],” Philley said. “When I made that one it was about pollinators and monarchs and also thinking

about how there's a lot of folklore attached to the monarch, especially in South America and Mexico. And so, there's this tradition of going out to decorate the graves at that time and honoring their dead and you know Dia De Los Muertos."

"But the idea of this butterfly actually being the souls of your departed and I kept thinking there's a lot of beauty in that and also a lot of metaphor about what we're doing to nature as we see the decline of the monarch population."

Phillee's inspiration for the other four paintings do not stray far away as they are all interconnected. "I wanted them to be these bright eye-catching colors that would also still have that connection to nature and all of them had those flowing lines and they could inspire like how we made the projection, which was such a cool process of going into virtual reality with Topher guiding me," Phillee said.

Topher Sipes, visual artist and designer, and Jasna Boudard, projection specialist, also known as the art team MetaCaustics, were

approached by Philley to collaborate on the installation after Philley attended their exhibit at the Waterloo Creek Show.



Melting Mirrors from Creek Show 2023, Austin, TX

by MetaCaustics | Topher Sipes & Jasna Boudard

Sipes, who is a Texas State alumnus, has worked on a multitude of projects including taking a role as scientific illustrator at the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment, working on murals commissioned by the City of San Marcos, and more recently working with projection as an art tool.

“Alicia’s paintings are kind of these minimalistic, organic, flowing forms of line in different types of color. And so, what we’ve done is taken her paintings as reference and we wanted to make graphics and moving animation based off of them,” Sipes said.

“So, basically what we did is brought the images of her paintings into virtual reality and then while looking at those, we’re able to recreate her paintings, but now in three dimensions and also take some of the silhouettes of her sculptures and instead of those being flat, they kind of have a lot of additional form to them and they kind of mimic the movement of the water or the vegetation.”

Sipes has been awaiting to incorporate elements of the San Marcos River, such as Texas wild rice, into artwork and has taken the

opportunity to add three dimensional movements to mimic the river life.



Indoor installation of "Alignmentality" at MotherShip Studios. Available for daytime viewing April 5th – April 7th. | Permission to use by Alicia Philley

“That feels satisfying ’cause it’s like there’s a been a personal aesthetic interest in depicting similar things and now I get to like actually do it and then have it be shown on a much larger scale than anticipated,” Sipes said. “It’s also been exciting to witness the progression of the project move from, you know, a performance at a studio into an installation on sculptures into like, oh, it’s an installation on the courthouse.” Along with the projection, there will be additional LED lighting to spotlight specific moments such as the moment of totality when the Moon blocks the Sun.

A soundtrack by Justin Sherburn in collaboration with Sara Nelson, also under the name Montopolis, will be played during the “Alignmentality” installation which will run for 24 minutes and will be played for five cycles. Reflecting on the experience of creating the art installation, feelings of anticipation and excitement have arised in these artists as they count down the days to the eclipse.

“This is, for most of us, a once in a lifetime occurrence and that’s exciting and it’s also strange because more often than not, our once in lifetime things are something we create for ourselves or an experience that happens because other people led us there,” Philley said. “I keep wondering what the possibility of that kind of energy of all these people. And that’s part of what I wanted this artwork to be about is how it could be this really positive, uplifting experience and if we bring our sense of wonder and awe to it, it will.”



Indoor installation of "Alignmentality" at MotherShip Studios. Available for daytime viewing April 5th – April 7th. | Permission to use by Alicia Philley

Sipes had the chance to experience the last eclipse in 2017 and feels fortunate to be able to witness another once again. "I can remember one, one specific moment that really stood out is, I forget what it's called, some people might call it beads or pearls or diamonds, but

there is a moment near the end of totality where when the sun is, before it gets to the other side, like right as it's starting to get to the other side there are these little specks of light before a full crescent forms," Sipes said.

Philley also hopes that the eclipse is not only a joyful experience to all, but also hopes her artwork brings motivation to others to give back to the community. "I really want my work to almost feel like a gateway into being so grateful that you feel driven to help because I also believe it's not going to be this one big solution and it's not going to be these few people who save us all. It's going to be every person saying, 'what can I do?'" Philley said.

WRITTEN BY: CAYLA SORIANO

ART INSTALLATION

FELICITY GUAJARDO

SOLAR ECLIPSE