



Norine Cardea's initiative, "Art from Chaos: A Call to Create Art in Place," began in late April when she called upon her neighbors to make their own altars in honor of Earth Day's 50th anniversary.
NORINE CARDEA; AND GETTY IMAGES

'Art from Chaos'

Roadside shrines a way for neighbors to connect

Amanda Sieradzki Council on Culture & Arts

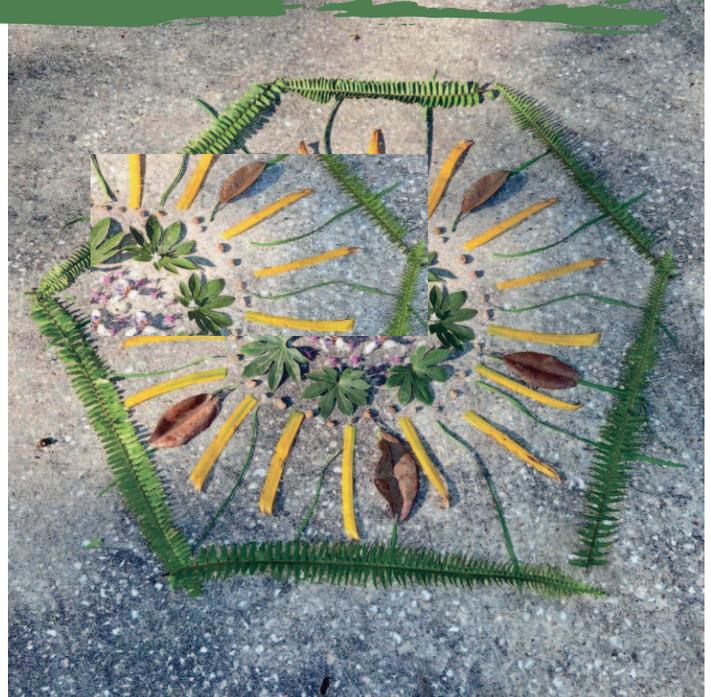
Mental health counselor, Norine Cardea molded the earth from chicken wire, duct tape and papier-mâché. Her globe spins freely, suspended by wire from arching tree branches and surrounded by small crystals sparkle like stars in the sunlight. A hand-painted sign below beckons all to "preserve and cherish this small blue dot, the only home we've ever known" — a quote from Carl Sagan's book, "A Pale Blue Dot."

As life creeps forward during this "great pause," Cardea recognizes a worldwide need for ritual and shrines such as these. Her initiative, "Art from Chaos: A Call to Create Art in Place," began in late-April when she called upon her neighbors to make their own altars in honor of Earth Day's 50th anniversary.

Now, the event has evolved into a community-wide invitation to commemorate the nature and beauty surrounding life in quarantine through roadside shrines. Cardea will also host a weekly virtual discussion series that kicks off on Friday, May 22, and will provide a forum for local artists to discuss their current works.

"I hear it in the sessions that I do and from the people that I talk to, this pandemic is changing things," says Cardea. "We feel how much we need each other more than anything. We are feeling how hard it is, the loneliness and limitations. So, if there was a way to represent these changes in an artistic way, they might endure."

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Lauren Kelly-Manders' geometric designs are created out of nature's bounty of leaves and blossoms. LAUREN KELLY-MANDERS

Art

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Cardea is no stranger to ritual. Before settling in Indianhead, she lived on the Miccosukee Land Cooperative. Annually, the co-op members celebrated All Souls Day by creating altars of flowers, photographs and art. People openly grieved and celebrated as they strolled the streets.

On Earth Day's 25th Anniversary, Cardea helped to organize the creation of an expansive sand mandala and spent a month collecting shells, leaves and dried flowers with the community. Her long-time friend, writer and naturalist Susan Cerulean, recalls the power the mandala held as a resident of the co-op.

Cerulean has remained neighbors with Cardea in Indianhead, displaying her own quarantine altar just down the street. The shrine is comprised of several life-size replicas of her favorite bird, the swallow-tailed kite.

"I think Norine is on to something that we all need," says Cerulean, who will release her next book, "I Have Been Assigned the Single Bird" in August. "In this time when we are destroying the habitat that birds need to live in, I was looking back at my career as a wildlife biologist and nature writer and the connections between care to the natural world and giving care to your family. I think that resonates for people now because lots of us are taking care of our children or our parents."

Cerulean primarily writes about North Florida, musing on the relationship between the environment and the everyday and pulling upon her experiences as an earth advocate.

Beneath her gliding birds, she set out free copies of another book "UnspOiled: Writers Speak for Florida's Coast," which details the importance of preserving the Gulf of Mexico and its ocean life from the perspective of scientists, students and writers.

For Cerulean, the black and white kites symbolize respect for nature, and the altar allowed her to share that with the community.

"It was fun to watch people notice the birds in the trees, and stop, pause and think about it all," says Cerulean. "Sometimes people don't think nature is as important as what we as humans want to do and natural things are overlooked. Shrines are a way to honor what we have here on this planet."

In Indianhead, there were six initial shrines, but those numbers have steadily increased as neighborhood participants share their photos on Cardea's "Roadside Art TLH" page. She has found humor in shrines like Ann Dunan's "Woody and Pecker" timber sculptures that whimsically depict two masked woodland creatures. Cardea is also awed by the leafy splendor of Lauren Kelly-Manders' geometric designs.

Cardea says she will release more prompts in the coming weeks for the community to reflect on in this ongoing series while the world waits to see what will happen next with COVID-19. Cerulean feels Cardea's invitation to create may ultimately expand the definition of shrines beyond roadside warnings or markers to honor lives lost in car accidents.

"How great would it be to expand remembrance?" muses Cerulean. "It would be great if this project could develop into something that celebrates a live oak tree or someplace that is larger than humans. It's something that many



Norine Cardea's "Art from Chaos" banners. NORINE CARDEA



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cultures have done, and this is our opportunity to catch up."

The pandemic has halted factories and emptied roadways, clearing pollution and bringing many animals out of hiding. Cardea hopes the community will take the time to not only observe these changes but to discover how to cope with the pandemic's uncertainties through their art-making.

"I think the main thing is to learn in different ways that we're not accustomed to learning," says Cardea. "As a larger culture I'm not sure that we are accustomed to learning through the arts, but when we do, it's the unexpected revelation of something in our hearts and human experiences. We actually often operate a lot from unconscious feelings, so this is a way of bringing that into focus."

For more on how to get involved with Art from Chaos: A Call to Create Art in Place please visit <https://www.facebook.com/RoadSideArtTLH/>. If interested in joining the weekly Zoom discussions, please contact Norine Cardea at nardea@comcast.net.

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org). This article is part of COCA's Creativity Persists collection which highlights how our community uses the arts to stay connected and inspired during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Susan Cerulean, an Indianhead neighbor of Norine Cardea, has composed a shrine of several life-size replicas of her favorite bird, the swallow-tailed kite. SUSAN CERULEAN

We sweat
the details,
so you
don't
have to.