Sapling sculpture will only last two years — and that's the point

Lydia Velazquez

09/17/2018

The lawn tucked between the Merrill Cazier Library and the engineering building at Utah State University was nothing more than another patch of grass on campus. This month it became the working ground for a sculpture made entirely of sticks.

As part of the Caine College’s Year of the Arts, North Carolina-based sculpture artist Patrick Dougherty began work on one of his creations with the help of volunteers from the community.

“Making something permanent is kind of a convention of the normal art world because you’re always thinking about what you could sell it for,” Dougherty said. “But, at least for my mind, the essence of a good sculpture is one that is highly interesting and compelling for people.”

This viewpoint toward art, its value and the expectations associated with it is unconventional, like Dougherty's choice medium: saplings.

Normally, Dougherty uses a sapling type native to the area he is working in and can be collected close to the production site. However, there is not enough willow sapling available in Cache Valley for the project, so Dougherty had some shipped from upstate New York.

The structure is anticipated to be up for roughly two years, depending on weather conditions.

Regardless of its lifespan, the sculpture is already making an impact.

“I teach 2D design and photography and my colleague teaches sculpture,” Shoup said. “We wanted to see if we could have something we could bring back to our students to help them think a little more creatively. Sometimes you see an actual sculpture that’s already built and you really miss out on the process and we love the process as artists, so it’s fun to be involved.”

Dougherty hopes students and members of the community will take advantage of the sculpture's accessibility and let the artwork become part of their lives.

“You want to choose a pivotal place in which people are going to see it and potentially use it,” Dougherty said. “So if it’s not kinda immediately available, it takes effort to go see it and this is just a step off the walk. A good sculpture, it promotes, it carries you, it's transportive.”

There is a live-stream to view the installation process at https://art.usu.edu/willow and a display of photos of Dougherty’s other work in the basement floor of the library.

Dougherty will be delivering the Caine College of the Arts Dean's Convocation at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday in the Russell/Wanlass Performance Hall. The event is open to the public.