

Upcoming exhibition brings experimental art and more to the West Valley campus

ASU professor mounts major collaborative exhibition featuring artists from around the world

By Dolores Tropiano, ASU News

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Ask [Tra Bouscaren](#) how he got into art and his answer is simple.

“Art saved my life when I was 19,” he says. “I was in a dark place and art showed me the way out.”

Bouscaren is an assistant professor at Arizona State University’s [School of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies](#) and founder of the [Expanded Media Lab \(eXMeLab\)](#) — a research lab and network of collaborative artists and scholars.

Bouscaren is mounting a major collaborative exhibition featuring artists from across the country and around the world. The events will take place over several weeks beginning on March 19 with a large-scale projection of animated hybrid animals by the Toronto-based [Public Visualization Lab](#).

“I was hired to bring this (the lab) with me,” the installation artist said. “That’s why I am doing this show. To introduce ASU’s [West Valley campus](#) to a broader community of artists.”

The formal gallery installation will open on March 26 at [ArtSpace West Gallery](#). New York University Professor Pedro Galvao Cesar de Oliveira and Xuedi Chen will be present at the opening and available to discuss their tactical media projects.

Among the experiences created for the exhibition will be a performance by award-winning harpist Noël Wan, who will be plucking stretched strings across two car doors salvaged from an accident.

The offbeat musical sculpture is a collaboration between Wan, Bouscaren and Bouscaren's former student, Ben Levy. The salvaged car doors, which are suspended from a rolling scaffold, are open and outstretched. Strings have been precisely placed to transform the piece into an abstract version of a harp. It is the antithesis of a traditional angel-wing-shaped harp known for ethereal music, and is titled "Angel of Death."

"The sound quality is very different," said Wan, a professor at Florida State University. "A lot of things about this are different."

Wan described the sound quality as "very industrial." She accepted Bouscaren's invitation to play at the exhibition because she wanted "to be open to being more experimental on the harp."

"It was just a challenge," she said.

The exhibition will also feature an experimental acupuncture sculpture of spiders (with Bouscaren serving as the pin cushion), workshops on deepfakes and surveillance, the screening of an award-winning film, "The Subconscious Art of Graffiti Removal," and more. Nearly 30 members of eXMeLab will participate.

There will be workshops, talks and performances from artists using "some of the most progressive new media in the country," Bouscaren said.

Several ASU students also have roles in the exhibitions that will take place throughout the campus.

Exhibition events on ASU's West Valley campus

7–8 p.m., Wednesday, March 19, location TBD

— Projection event by the [Public Visualization Lab](#), represented by professors Dave Colangelo (Toronto Metropolitan University) and Immony Men (Ontario College of Art & Design).

6:30–8 p.m., Friday, March 21, location TBD

— Screening of "The Subconscious Art of Graffiti Removal," an award-winning film by Professor [Matt McCormick](#) (Gonzaga University).

6–8 p.m., Wednesday, March 26, ArtSpace West

— Gallery opening featuring an installation created by Tra Bouscaren and Interactive Telecommunications Professor [Pedro Galvao Cesar de Oliveira](#) (New York University), who will be present for the opening.

7–8 p.m., Wednesday, April 2, CLCC 141—

Deepfake workshop with professors Jenn Gradeckie and Derek Curry (Northeastern University).

7–8 p.m., Thursday, April 3, CLCC 1141 —

Award-winning harpist [Noël Wan](#) (professor at Florida State University) will perform on an offbeat harp created using two car doors salvaged from an accident.

(Video: {<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRZauFsMrKU>})

Creativity through collaboration

When it comes to creating art, collaboration is key for Bouscaren.

“It’s not about me, it’s about we,” he says. “I’m more interested in pursuing more dispersed authorship and less interested in taking credit.”

Nor does he prefer to work with just one discipline. Like the ASU [Interdisciplinary Arts and Performance](#) program he teaches in, both Bouscaren and the exhibition feature a wide range of creative practices and goals.

“Preserving disciplines can be counterproductive,” he said. “Most artists don’t ask, ‘Is this a painting? Is this sculpture?’ Artists don’t care anymore. Is the work strong? Is it gaining traction? Most people that are doing exciting work don’t stay in one lane.”

Born in Boston, Bouscaren went to Yale University and later the University of Pennsylvania.

At Yale, he had to leave school due to health problems, but it was around that time that he first walked into a community drawing class that changed his life. He soon returned to Yale and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in philosophy, but continued painting.

“I think art is a better version of philosophy,” he philosophizes. “It answers the same questions but is a better way to go.”

Upon graduating from Yale, he was offered a position with a think tank in Washington, D.C., but instead took a labor job with a construction company. He was tasked with packing trash cans with debris. While doing so, he began to see the beauty that appeared as he arranged the garbage. The experience would inspire his later work with e-waste.

Bouscaren continued painting, evolving into what he describes as a “fairly successful painter” with a group show at the Lincoln Center in New York and other places. After getting his master’s degree in interdisciplinary fine arts from the University of Pennsylvania at the age of 36, he began his work as a post-disciplinary artist. His installations have been on view at the Mattress Factory museum in Pittsburgh, the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona and the Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin.

Teaching, trash and other things

These days, Bouscaren’s work critiques waste culture and surveillance.

In his West Valley campus studio, an installation in progress. It combines billboards, surgical scissors, discarded neon and Styrofoam product wrappers that he compares to “jilted lovers.” Surveillance cameras, like spies, are snuck in between the WWII flag and projectors. On the floor of the studio are long body bags designed from discarded billboards.

He teaches a digital editing and media literacy class, as well as a composition class at ASU.

Levy, his former student, said working with Bouscaren has been inspiring: “His enthusiasm is infectious.”

Like Bouscaren, Levy returned to school for an advanced degree later in life. He will be graduating from ASU in May with a master’s degree in arts and interdisciplinary studies. Bouscaren sits on the board for his capstone.

Levy acknowledged that it is difficult to pursue an arts career.

“I’m hoping that working here will lead to me becoming a more prominent installation artist,” he said.

And that the exhibition will lead to greater awareness of the art scene on ASU’s West Valley campus.

“I highly recommend the West Valey campus,” he said. “Come on out and see what is going on.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Among the experiences created for the exhibition is a "harp" made out of two car doors salvaged from an accident. Image courtesy EJ Hernandez/ASU News