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Art on the spot

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A few of Madison's parking meters, light poles and car antennas may be looking decidedly cozier this fall, swathed in the colorful crafts of "guerrilla knitter" Magda Sayeg.

Sayeg's nationwide project, humorously named "Knitta, Please," is one of five new public art installations that should be cropping up around the city over the next several months.

The Madison Arts Commission has approved funding through the BLINK Temporary Public Art program. Now, the artists involved have to get approval from various city entities to make their pieces happen.

"In Madison, we're fortunate in that alternative forms of expression are given legitimacy," said Karin Wolf, arts program administrator with the city of Madison. "It's a hassle to go through the red tape and to jump all the hoops, but ... we welcome participation from different demographics, different ages, different aesthetics."

For the third annual "Art in the Park," a group of artists will turn Brittingham Park into a festival of graffiti on July 24. Tyler Mackie's project, Park It!, proposes using metered parking spots as art installation space for one day in September.

Many projects combine whimsy with a message. Michael Duffy's fake subway is intended to make people think in a positive way about transportation - but seeing a New York City-style station heading to nowhere will probably make them laugh, too.

"Ever since I moved here, people have been talking about getting commuter rail," said Duffy, a graphic artist and web designer. "But it never seemed to happen, so I thought I'd build it."

Duffy's station must get extra permissions, since it has the potential to impede sidewalk traffic. But because the art is temporary, whatever problems it poses are temporary, too.

To get around excessive permits, the "mural" Christopher Murphy and Loey Blue proposed at the James Madison Park shelter will make use of canvas, light and cut-outs. "In Light of Everything," which plans to open in mid-August, creates an urban scene surrounded by nature, tiny images of butterflies, ducks, trees and water.

"It doesn't have to be that everything is a super important piece," Murphy said. "There's a lot of time for whimsy and a lot of time for just beauty.

"With light ... you can make something really come alive," he added. "At night, it can become extremely dramatic."

Blue, a senior at Shabazz City High School, is creating the drawings, while Murphy, a master electrician, will handle the technological aspects. Murphy received a BLINK grant in 2009 to create the glowing "Girl on a Ledge" sculpture, a child with a book perched for a short while on top of the new Madison Children's Museum.

"All the BLINK grants are playful," said Celia Klehr, arts commission chair. "The fact that they're not permanent and the name - it's a blink, it shows up and goes away - is playful to begin with."

Klehr called this year's round of applications "a real treat," adding that many made her laugh out loud.

"The projects have just grown in sophistication and what artists can do with such a small amount of money," Klehr said.

The limit for funding is \$1,500. It's enough sometimes to cover costs, but the program is primarily intended to get more art into the public space and teach artists how to apply for city money.

"They're giving us what they can give us," Murphy said, "but really there's nothing for public art. What it's doing is fostering this conversation. Now it's your turn - you do something."

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