

Francis Michael Dawson @ Jardin de las Granadas

Stochastic Probability

By ERIN J. SMITH / CASA

FOUR LIVING SCULPTURES will grow before our very eyes over the coming months as thousands of carefully cultivated succulents bloom in life-sustaining, cylindrical figures. Combining a passion for botany with an artistic sensibility, artist Francis Michael Dawson engineered the family of four figurative pieces, which will be on exhibit in the Jardin de las Granadas

through April 22nd as part of Santa Barbara County’s collaborative efforts to bring art to downtown.

“It really is about the promise of what’s to come,” said Dawson, who calls the piece *Stochastic Probability* in reference to that mysterious vibration between our

predictable actions and life’s random events. “Our lives get rocked, the world is shaken, but we continue to hope,” he said. “These monuments, these pillars, are a testament to that hope.”

Dawson grew up in Thousand Oaks surrounded by his multi-generational



Close up of *Stochastic Probability* by Francis Michael Dawson

For his installation in the Jardin de las Granadas, Dawson spent two months just creating and testing the correct blend of soil. He also grew and propagated between four and six thousand succulents – two thousand of which made their way into the four self-watering, sustainable sculptures. “I wanted to create something unique for Santa Barbara, unique for the Jardin,” said Dawson. “I went there, hung out, and submitted a few different sketches to the reviewing committee. It took the full eight months to pull the different pieces together, but it never once felt like work. I just knew that this is what was supposed to be there.”

Dawson now resides in Santa Maria with his wife and two daughters. He serves as the 5th District Commissioner on the Santa Barbara County Arts Commission and is a member of the Santa Maria Arts Council. He also volunteers for the San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden’s Education Program and works with the summer arts education programs for Orcutt Children’s Arts Foundation. Dawson’s artwork has been featured in multiple group exhibitions, and he is the recipient of several awards, including the James Irvine Foundation, the Santa Barbara Foundation, UCSB Art Affiliates Fellowships, and the William Dole Memorial Fund. He was recently featured in the *Wall Street Journal* for his creative and sustainable landscape work.

“People have entrusted me to create and contribute to the culture of our time,” said Dawson. “But without each other, culture doesn’t exist. I hope each person who visits will experience both the present and the possibility.”

Jardin de las Granadas is located at 21 East Anapamu Street, between State and Anapamu Streets. For more information, contact the Santa Barbara Arts Commission at 568-3994 or www.sbartsc.com.



Photos by Terra Paige

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Stochastic Probability by Francis Michael Dawson on display at Jardin de las Granadas

Sicilian and Italian family, among whom he counts artists such as watercolorist Harry Sutton Palmer and Lettie Palmer Heaton, a talented botanical illustrator, as well as several engineers, doctors, and even a rocket scientist. The combination has served him well. Dawson went on to earn a Bachelors of Fine Art from UCSB. After working in corporate sales and helping other people start businesses, Dawson turned to his own passions: gardening and making art.

“It fires me up that I can create a feeling simply by cultivating and altering someone’s backyard,” said Dawson, a talented landscape artist with a passion for growing things. “Gardening is just another form of art for me.”



Stochastic Probability at night

Photos by Wayne McCall