

The Butterfly Bench

By Lee Ann Paradise

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Playful and inviting, the Butterfly Bench by Anita Valencia is a reminder of the importance of creative expression and the healing power of art. Funded by the San Antonio River Foundation as part of its Mission Reach Project, the bench, at first glance, has a lighthearted, whimsical appearance. Indeed, there is youthfulness to its design with its multiple butterflies placed against a cobalt blue background. However, upon closer look, you see that the butterflies are made from repurposed aluminum cans, thus transforming the cans into works of art. Butterflies themselves are symbolic of transformation. In fact, that is what the San Antonio River Foundation is trying to do through its various projects: transform. Transformation can come in many forms. Through the artist who created the bench, the idea of transformation is presented to us in a call to embrace recycling and conservation.



For me as a viewer and participant by sitting on the bench, the interaction is both cerebral and physical. Butterflies have always had a special meaning to me. When I see them, I have a sense of wellbeing. To know that a butterfly can begin its journey in Canada and persevere until it reaches its destination in Mexico is very moving to me. That delicate little butterfly works its way through wind, rain, and all sorts of adversity. In many ways, that butterfly isn't very different from us. We, too, work through many things in life as we journey down our individual paths. And yet, we journey together, too. We are not alone. We can help each other accomplish things. Connecting with the bench made me feel that anything was possible. As a person who believes in recycling and is passionate about conservation that component resonates with me.



On another level, the bench has a healing quality to it. Bolted securely to the ground, it invites you to come sit a while—to slow your pace, rest, and enjoy your surroundings. Because a bench has room for two, it also invites togetherness and it is together that we will transform our environment. It is, if you will, a call to action—a call to work together not only to transform and restore our physical world, but to transform and restore ourselves as well.