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Art bike workshops show kids how to engineer their creativity

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Local sculptor, Roger Halligan, helps chop up this donated child's bicycle to begin its transformation in becoming one of the first in a new fleet being created by area kids enrolled in the summer workshops. Staff photo.

Autumn Patten, a student at Chattanooga School for the Arts and Sciences, knows the value of multi-tasking. That is why it was easy for her to imagine making a bicycle that would not only take her down the road, but could also strum a guitar at the same time.

Patten is one of the first students taking part in a unique "art bike" summer workshop in Chattanooga where local kids and professional artists work together to create functioning kinetic and highly unusual bicycles.

At the end of the first week there will not only be Patten's guitar bike, but also a fish bowl bicycle (rider will be peddling inside the fish bowl), a violin bicycle, a dragon bicycle and a bumper car bicycle. The

Check out the bikes

What: Reception for all of the student art bike artists + bikes

When: Saturday, July 30th 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Where: Outdoor Chattanooga facility

workshops continue with a new group of ideas from a new set of kids participating this week.

Visiting professional art bike artists, Smitty Regula and Natalie LeDeux, who have been making art bikes and art cars in Houston for 10 years, were brought to town to lead the two one-week workshops here through July 29th.

"We brought the kids together and showed them all different kinds of art bikes, and we told them there was no wrong answer for whatever they wanted to design. Then we kind of set them free," Regula said.

The kids learned how to grind and cut metal and other technical skills such as seeing how a welder works. But Regula said they also were introduced to how science and engineering comes into play during the creative process.

"They had to learn how their own two dimensional drawings of their design ideas could turn into a 3D sculpture and how to actually make the bike still work so it will roll and be balanced. They learned what materials to use, what works and what to do with mistakes," he said.



Merlyn Townley begins deconstructing the frame that will be converted into a dual cranking bike that will strum a guitar as its rider pedals. Staff photo.

Patten's guitar bike is well past the conceptual stage and on its way to becoming a functioning strumming vehicle, thanks to local bike mechanic, Merlyn Townley of Merlyn Mechanics in Chattanooga.

"I can see what they're working on and then I work on ways to make it physically happen as a mechanical

thing. It's cool because it's art and as a mechanic I can contribute to the art," Townley said.

Townley said he is deconstructing the frame of Patten's bike, putting in new and additional bottom brackets, cranks and chains, and will locate "a pic of some kind" that will go through the crank arm to strum the welded guitar.

Bicycles and bicycle parts of all sizes, many that were destined for the scrap yard or otherwise unused were donated to local arts nonprofit, Art 120, who presented the workshops.

The organization will also maintain and manage the fleet for educational purposes.

"The kids are learning how to build them but they will stay involved with their bike as the bikes are shown in the community, and the kids will get recognition from their communities," Kate Warren, the organization's executive director, said.

The bikes are scheduled to be on display this fall for an art bike brigade during the River Rocks festival on October 8th and 9th, as well as the MainX24 street party in December, Warren said.

Workshop's visiting artists show off their own art bikes



Regula's flamethrower bike carries stuffed animals and propane on board. Staff photo.



Two bicycles built as one for two. Staff photo.



Smitty Regula rides one of his many conceptual art bikes around the Southside. Staff photo.



Violin player and art bike workshop participant, Autumn Greene, 13, of Ooltewah Middle School, also made a music-themed bike. Greene said she plans to "bling out" her bike and that she will never look at junk items the same now that she knows what can be made from reusing scraps and parts. Visiting instructor Smitty Regula said it made him very happy to hear a student say that. Staff photo.

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