

LEGOs connect with nature at Kauai's National Tropical Botanical Garden

June 3, 2016

8:01 AM MST



Monarch Butterfly LEGO Sculpture
Sean Kenney

It is never too late to relive your childhood or to play with your imagination. A whimsical world of LEGOs has been created in Kauai's 259-acre McBryde Garden of the **National Tropical Botanical Garden (NTBG)** in a special exhibition called **Nature Connects**. A larger-than-life colorful Monarch butterfly, consisting of 60,500 LEGO bricks, is just one of 14 sculptures ranging from 12 inches to seven feet standing amid the endless tropical and exotic foliage. This creative journey can be enjoyed by both children and adults alike.

New York artist, children's author, and creator **Sean Kenney** has taken his traveling North American show to Kauai, where it opened May 6th and will continue to run until July 10, 2016.

According to Kenney, "The show is about connections in our diverse ecosystem. Everything in nature is interconnected in an intricate balance, much as LEGO pieces illustrate connections."

Each sculpture attempts to illustrate this relationship, from a fox hunting a rabbit to a hummingbird feeding on a trumpet flower. Other sculptures depict the beauty of nature, such as the seven-foot tall rose. There is also a life-size mower that visitors often mistake for the real thing.

How long does it take for Kenney to create these larger-than-life LEGO masterpieces? It takes from a few weeks to a few months depending on the intricacy and size. The Hummingbird is the largest sculpture, with a wing span of more than five feet, while the Monarch Butterfly made of 60,549 pieces has a wingspan of eight feet.

His sculptures are not computer generated. There is much visualization required. The design process starts with a gathering of photographs or drawings, and he then uses graph paper or a computer model to plan out basic size and shape. He follows his plans by building the prototype with LEGO parts.

According to Kenney, "Once I have a prototype that I like, I'll rebuild it, then glue it, while using the prototype as my template. I spent four weeks designing and planning the Hummingbird sculpture, researching images of these birds in nature and choosing the perfect colors. It took around five-plus weeks to actually build it."

This show is part of a worldwide garden tour, which began in 2012 with the brainstorming and creativity of Kenney and Teresa McLaughlin, then director of **Reiman Gardens in Iowa**. McLaughlin originally came up with idea of utilizing Kenney's LEGO creations for an exhibit to raise money for Reiman Gardens, which blossomed into five touring exhibits in four years. It presently is in 12 gardens around North America.

According to McLaughlin, "The exhibit's purpose was for these sculptures to stress sustainable themes, conservation, the importance of nature, mutualism, pollination, water resources, and habitat preservation.

Also, using LEGO bricks as a medium easily engages youth to understand these concepts while unplugging them from all their devices as they visit a garden, zoo, or museum.”

Nature Connects includes more than 100 larger-than-life sculptures using some two million LEGO pieces. The North American exhibit already has bookings into 2021, with plans to continue creating new sculptures and venues.

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