

## **Exhibit explores impact of humans on endangered species of Rio Grande**

By Kathaleen Roberts / Journal Staff Writer  
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Canuppa Hanska Luger works on “(Be)Longing,” a life-size ceramic and steel bison sculpture installation for the “Species in Peril Along the Rio Grande” exhibition

Sixty-six million years ago, a mammoth asteroid landed near the Yucatán Peninsula, decimating the dinosaurs and roughly three-quarters of the species on Earth. This time, the asteroid is human.

In 2015, a book called “The Sixth Extinction” by Elizabeth Kolbert warned of a devastating sequel, with plants and animals already disappearing at a ferocious rate,

their habitats destroyed or compromised by human activity.

516 ARTS is exploring that impact with “Species in Peril Along the Rio Grande,” opening Saturday, Sept. 28, and running through Dec. 28. The exhibition seeks to turn science into stories.

This hybrid of art and science features works by 23 artists responding locally to the 2019 United Nations report warning that nature’s decline is “unprecedented” and that species

extinction rates are accelerating at an alarming pace. The information rose from a constellation of 145 expert authors from 50 countries across the past three years, based on the systematic review of about 15,000 scientific and government sources.



"(I choose to take this as a sign I must entrust myself to life)" by Kaitlin Bryson and Hollis Moore. (Courtesy of 516 ARTS)

According to the Tucson-based Center for Biological Diversity, the endangered species along the Rio Grande Watershed include the silvery minnow, bald eagle, peregrine falcon, jaguar, Canada lynx, ocelot, Jemez Mountains salamander, greenback cutthroat trout, gray wolf, Mexican gray wolf and bison, among many others, as well as the cottonwood trees nestled along the river's banks. The center is a national partner for the project, along with Defenders of Wildlife.

Flowing in both mystery and myth, the 1,885-mile Rio Grande Watershed winds from Colorado's San Juan Mountains, through New Mexico and west Texas, through northern



Mexico into the Gulf of Mexico.

Nearly 1 million species already face extinction unless the world takes action, the report states. The carnage is being led by familiar threats: logging, poaching, overfishing, pollution, the spread of roads to accommodate exploding populations and, of course, global warming, largely driven by the addiction to fossil fuels.

516's massive project has been in the works for two years, director Suzanne Sbarge said.

"Part of the goal is for people to understand this," she said. "People don't realize the scale of the biological crisis, which is now being called annihilation rather than extinction."



"Fauna Mesoamericana (detail)" by Catalina Delgado Trunk

Born on North Dakota's Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, New Mexico artist Cannupa Hanska Luger is creating a life-size ceramic and steel bison sculpture installation for the exhibition.

Once scattered across the country, by 1895 the bison's population was decimated from approximately 30 million-50 million to 1,500 in just 45 years. The species being revived today is a hybrid of native and Asian bison; the only examples of the genet-

ically pure Mountain Bison were driven into northern Canada and Alaska, Hanska Luger said. A few surviving remnant herds today live in protected areas such as Yellowstone National Park.

Both grasslands and predators such as the wolf, the cougar and bears depended on the bison.

"There are (plant) species that will not germinate without the weight of a hoof," Hanska Luger said.

The artist filmed a video of his sculpture lying in the Rio Grande, red satin ribbons flowing like blood.

El Paso-based artist Suzi Davidoff created "Simplified World," used on the exhibition catalog cover, with charcoal, gesso and old maps. The flapping wings represent the Aplomada falcon, now endangered in West Texas. It's also native to southern New Mexico.

A full-time studio artist, Davidoff taught at the University of Texas at El Paso for 23 years.



"Simplified World" by Suzi Davidoff

"Obviously, animals and plants don't have borders," she said in a telephone interview. "For many of the (endangered) species, it's because of a change of habitat; encroaching grazing and drying up of water sources."

Nearly 10 years of drought make the Rio Grande very susceptible to climate change, 516 education coordinator Viola Arduini said. Thanks to this desiccation and regulation through dams, the cottonwoods aren't reproducing.

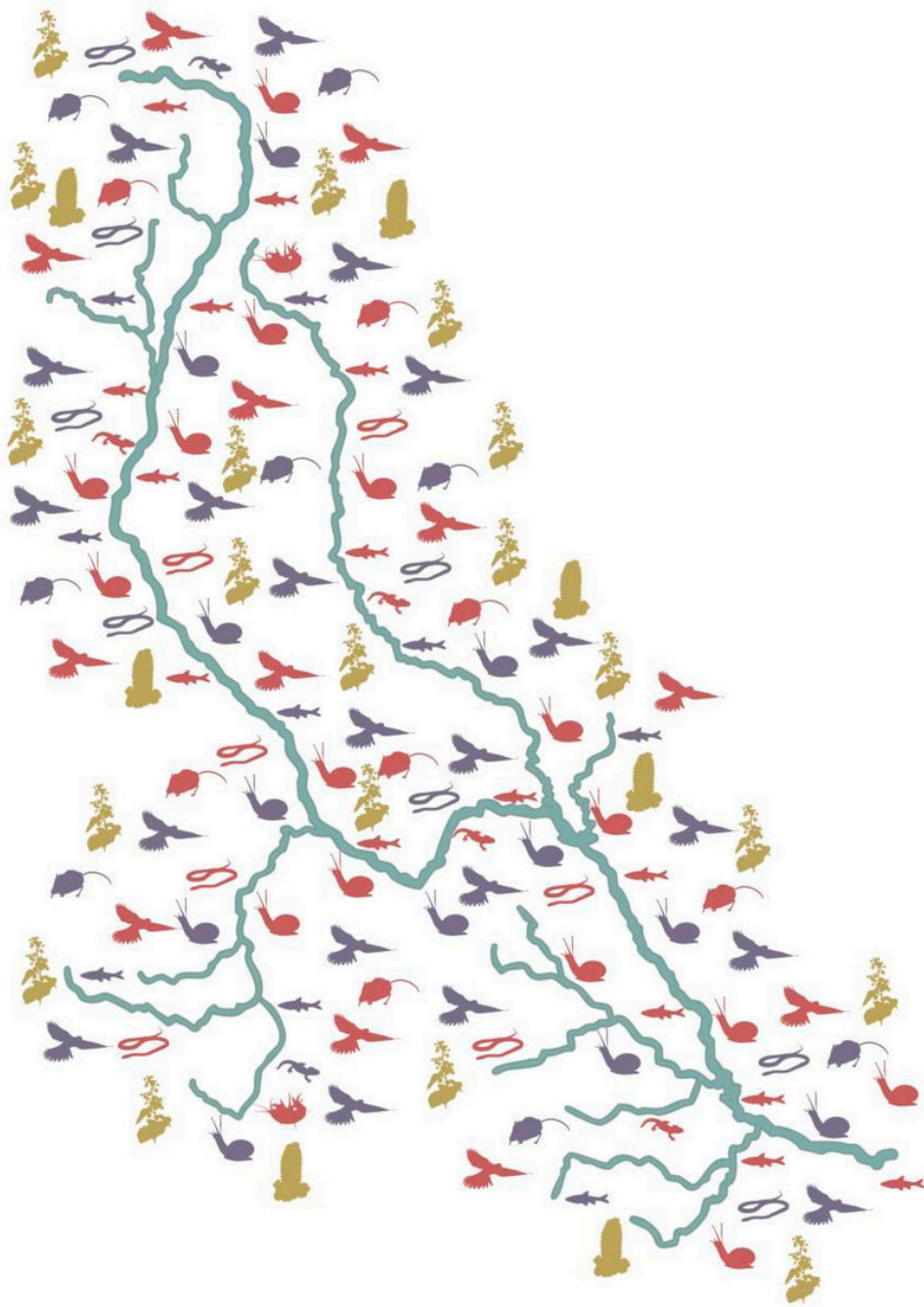
"The cottonwoods were planted in the '40s," Arduini said. "They have 15 to 20 years left. The cottonwoods need flowing (water) in order to reseed."

Each of the artworks will feature information on campaigns to combat the destruction in this experiment of science, art and storytelling.

"Part of the goal of this is to create action," Sbarge explained.

"The sky hasn't fallen yet," Arduini said. "There is still hope."





- Endangered Wildlife
- Threatened Wildlife
- Endangered Plants

Ruben Olguin's "Evaporation"