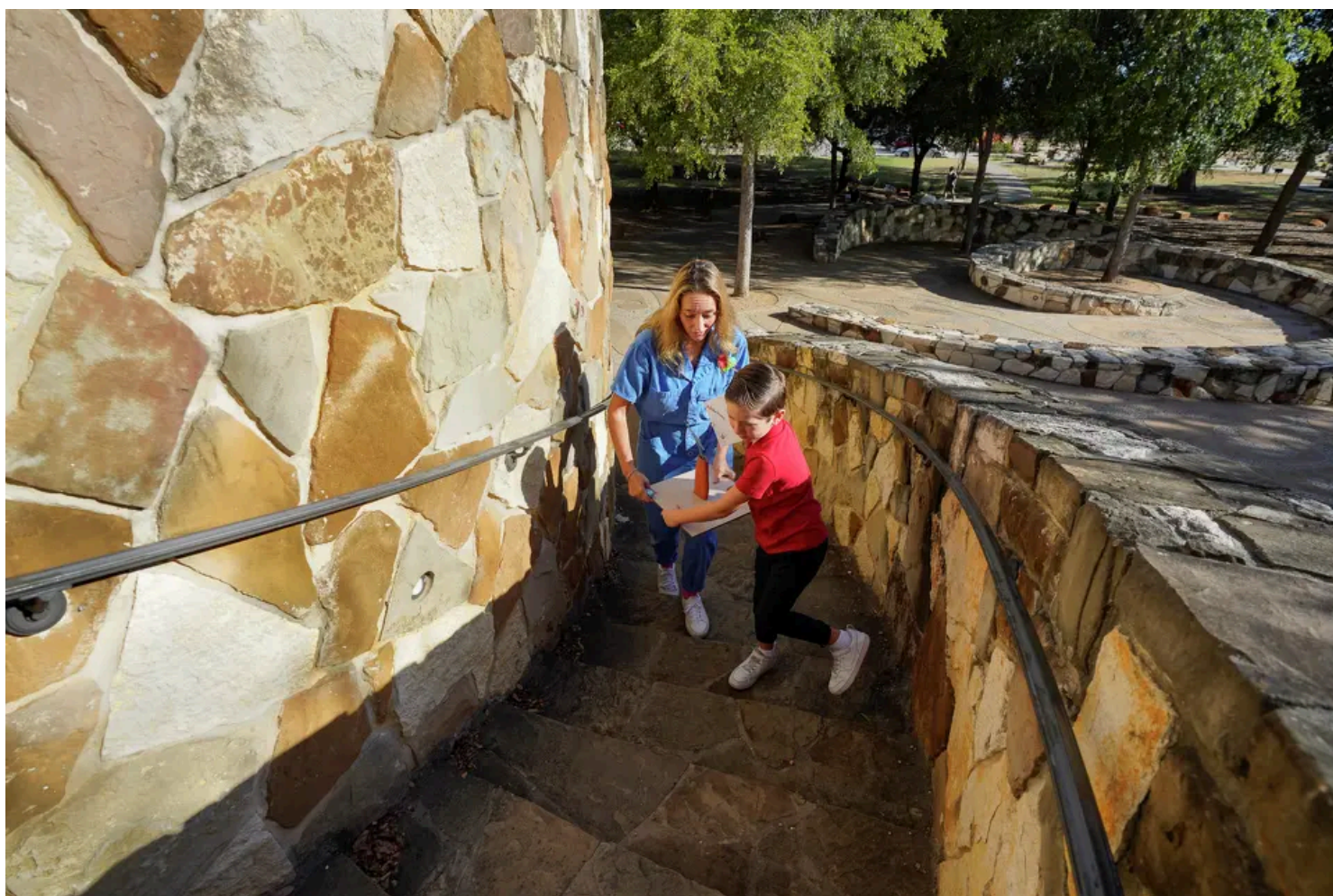


LIFESTYLE

San Antonio artist hides free ceramic vases along the river in Concepción Park

By **Richard A. Marini**, Staff Writer

Aug 20, 2025



Artist Daniela Oliver de Portillo and her son Emiliano climb to the top of the stone platform overlooking Mission Concepción. Anyone who happens upon one of her handmade ceramic vases is free to take the piece home to enjoy.

Robin Jerstad

With help from sons Rodrigo, 10, and Emiliano, 8, Daniela Oliver de Portillo prepared to hide three of her art pieces in plain sight in the River Return section of Concepción Park.

A gift for whoever finds them, the pieces are part of a larger project — “Hidden Blooms” — commissioned by the San Antonio River Foundation for its “Art In the Open” program. Oliver describes her project as both an interactive art installation and a scavenger hunt.

What that means is that anyone who happens upon one of her handmade ceramic vases that holds delicate paper cyanotype flowers is free to take the piece home to enjoy.

“I leave them out for people to find,” said Oliver, 43. “I think it’s a really nice way to connect with others, even if you never meet them.”



Daniela Oliver de Portillo is also preparing for her first-ever solo exhibition opening Aug. 27 at Ruiz-Healy Art.

Robin Jerstad

“Hidden Blooms” is one of two recent art projects that represent a resurgence of Oliver’s artistic efforts, which she said was kickstarted during the pandemic. Back then, she concedes, she became caught in an endless loop of social media doomscrolling. Eventually, she decided it was time to make a change and return to making art, something she’d abandoned a dozen years earlier.



“Hidden Blooms” is one of two recent art projects that represent a resurgence of Daniela Oliver de Portillo’s artistic efforts, which she said was kickstarted during the pandemic. Back then, caught in an endless loop of social media doomscrolling, she decided it was time to make a change and return to making art, something she’d abandoned a dozen years earlier.

Josh Huskin

The second project is her first-ever solo exhibition titled “So Marvelous, De Nuevo Florecer (‘To Flourish Once More’)” at [Ruiz-Healy Art](#).

This will be only the third time that the gallery will host a solo exhibition of first-time artists, according to owner Patricia Ruiz-Healy.

'So Marvelous, De Nuevo Florecer'

When: Aug. 27-Sept. 13

Where: Ruiz-Healy Art, 201 E. Olmos Drive

Details: 210-804-2219 or ruizhealyart.com

“The two previous times, the artists had won grants from the city,” she said. “Daniela didn’t have funding, but we were sufficiently impressed with her work to mount the exhibition.”

Oliver’s decision to start making art again came only after some serious soul searching. She’d previously practiced art, including a year as a sculptor’s apprentice in Florence, Italy, yet had long questioned whether she was a “real” artist.

“I was afraid to ‘go for it,’ so to speak,” she said. “But during the pandemic I decided I was going to face that fear and try. I was like, how can I not do this? How can I waste the opportunity that life has given me to be a creative person?”

In 2021, while attending an art workshop at the Penland School of Craft in North Carolina (“It's a summer camp for adult artists,” she said), she learned the art of cyanotype, also known as sun prints. This involves placing items, in her case various translucent materials, on specially coated papers and exposing them to the sun. The result is a distinctive image in cyan blue that, because it was once used for copying architectural drawings, begat the term “blueprint.”

“Cyanotype became the way I found my voice,” she said.

When she heard of the San Antonio River Foundation’s “Art in The Open” program, she decided to apply.

“Daniela’s proposal to let viewers experience and take home her art was not at all typical,” said Ashley Mireles, public arts curator for the river foundation. “It makes art much more accessible.”



Artist Daniela Oliver de Portillo and her son Emiliano hide one of the vases atop the stone platform overlooking Mission Concepción and the river in Concepción Park.

Robin Jerstad



Emiliano Portillo helps his mother prepare to hide one of the vases. Oliver create 40 vases and is hiding them along the river.

Robin Jerstad

On a recent morning in Concepción Park, Oliver and her sons placed one piece atop the stone platform overlooking Mission Concepción; another within one of the River Return's swirling, walled vortices; and a third — chosen by Rodrigo — next to one of the park's stately oak trees. Although she let her sons choose where to put them on the first day of the art placements, Oliver, ever the hovering mother, following close behind lest they break any of the delicate pieces.

In addition to the paper flowers, each vase carries a bilingual message inviting the finder to take the piece as a keepsake. Oliver also used washable sidewalk chalk to assure them that why they're there, writing, "Take it. It's a gift."

Oliver said she's made 40 vases and plans to conceal several along the river each day until Sept. 3. "Art in the Open" encourages artists to engage the community in the contemporary art experiences. Also supported by the city's Department of Arts & Culture, it paid her a stipend of \$2,500. That was enough to cover materials, with a bit left over as a fee, although when she takes into account the amount of time she spent making the vases, she estimated she probably didn't make more than minimum wage. "But as an artist, once you have an idea there's nothing you can do until you get it out of you," she said. She concedes to feeling somewhat emotional. "All last week I didn't sleep well," she said. "All this work was done, and it was time to let them go. There's so much control in creating the art, and then it's like, that's it, it's not mine anymore."

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Richard A. Marini

REPORTER



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Previously, he was an editor and columnist for the Express-News. The Association of Food Journalists once awarded him Best Food Columnist. He has freelanced for American Archaeology, Cooking Light and many other publications. Reader's Digest once sent him to Alaska for a week. He came back.