Pre-Figurative Structures for Social Connection[1]

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Abstract

The world has many structures that foster social connection. Especially in the age of the internet, there are many off and online worlds that do so. Alternative festivals, temporary communities and electoral guerrilla theater organized online and practiced offline are all potential ways to prefigure the world we want to live in.

Together, the FEAST team created physically and socially intelligent structures that facilitate cooperation, emotional release and transcend the expectations of architecture and infrastructure as fixed, emboldening viewers to become participants.

Project: A Band to Welcome Spring

This *band* is composed of an internationally spread out network of individuals and groups, dedicated to an outdoor performance in honor of the coming of spring. This winter, the Covid-19 pandemic exaggerated a form of isolated hibernation in our society. This project seeks to unite and celebrate the communities and commonalities that we have together. The event took place on March 21 at 5:08 PM, everywhere. Although the band was asynchronous in place, overlaps in time zones united us synchronously. As spring began around the world, so did the welcoming music and performances. Back in snowy January, we began the project in three parts, structure, hallmark, and uniforms. We collaborated over zoom and using online classroom tools such as Miro.

Background

A Band to Welcome Spring is inspired by municipal clocks and bell towers that for centuries have been civic recognitions of the shared keeping and passage of time. A popular example of this is the Delacorte clock at the Central Park zoo in New York (where people stop to watch the animals play instruments at a certain time). In this full pandemic year, interest in and the need for social connection and celebration (while respecting physical distance) feels especially needed.

The celebration time we chose was the vernal equinox (the coming of spring) which was on March 20th. We built a small structure to set up on a hill in Ann Arbor and were joined by 3 willing musicians and, among others: a wedding band in India that includes a horse in their ensemble, a custom-built island on Animal Crossing with animal musicians, a tuning fork in Vancouver, a slide whistle in Tokyo, a stand-up bass in Grand Rapids, a kazoo duo in Oregon, a dancing dog in DC, a string quartet in Central Park and a spinning disk in London.

Creative Process

Due to the pandemic, we were unable to physically meet to discuss and collaborate on the different sections of the project. We tackled this by using *Miro* to share our ideas, build and iterate them to create the final result. Our team created many collages drawing inspiration from the aesthetics of *Archigram*, an experimental architecture collective that draws inspiration from technology to create a new reality that was solely expressed through hypothetical projects.
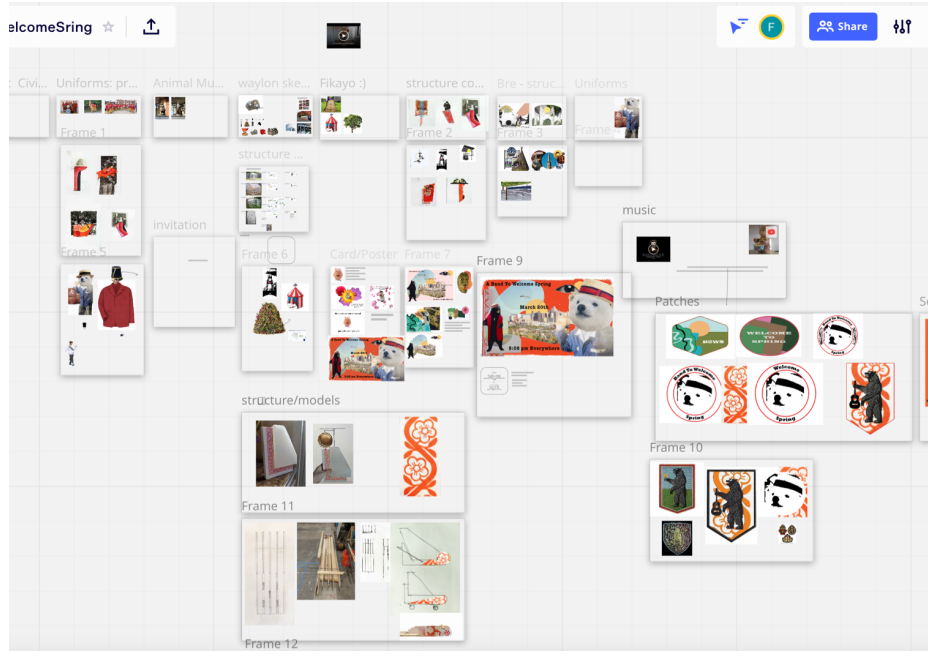
Figure 1: We iterated many of our initial ideas and posted our progress in Miro.

Structure

An object was to be built or realized in some fashion. Inspiration was drawn from time announcing devices like bell towers, performing mechanized animal clocks, and the aesthetics of the many *corona shacks* that were populating the sidewalks of restaurants to enable outdoor dining.

We began with several scale models, exploring the material palette and form. A few aesthetics emerged from the study models. A seven foot toboggan served as the inspiration for the beginning of the design. The sled was well aged and has many loaded associations with winter, so we constructed a fresh frame from salvaged lumber. Colors of red and white were adapted from a flowered wallpaper pattern, and later adapted into a repeatable stencil.

We weighed the idea of having the structure be at the scale of an outdoor dining booth, allowing us to emerge from it symbolically. Eventually, the scale was brought down to fit a small mechanical bear with cymbals, which sat within the structure on a small throne. Fake animal fur lined and insulated the inside of the throne. Protecting and covering the throne was a removable coroplast roof, reinforced with aluminum bars. These materials mimic the aesthetic of many corona shacks.

Abstracted imagery of red and white vining flowers was painted on the exterior runners of the sleigh.

Figure 2: The structure for the spring band. The red and white flowers were painted to add an imagery of spring to the structure.

Hallmark

The hallmark created was to represent the music being played to welcome spring. It was also used to connect the performances that took place in different locations and time zones. The image of a bear was a commonality between the flag/patch and postcard we created.

Figure 3: Final Flag/Patch design. The background is the same vining flowers as seen on the Structure (Figure 2).

The postcard design is a collage of bear images with hats and red vests, which were also the main piece of our uniform. We created multiple postcard designs and iterated some of them (as seen in Appendix C) to create the final design. The final postcard design is a collage of bear images with hats and red vests which were also the main piece of our uniform. We printed out multiple copies of the postcards and sent them to invite more participants.

Figure 4: Front and Back of postcard with message to invite participants.

Uniforms

The main piece of our uniform was a red coat. We ironed flower patches and sewed fur onto it. We hired a wedding band in India to perform during on the day of the equinox. They also had red jackets as a part of their uniform so we also wore red coats to match their uniforms. We wore animal heads during the performance. This was inspired by the animal bands that ring with clocks.

Performances

On the 20th of March 2021 at 5:08pm we pulled the structure up on a hill and performed wearing our red coats and animal masks. We were joined by many people across town and the world to welcome spring. The performances were sent to us via google form and posted on Instagram (@nicktobier). More information on this project can be found on bit.ly/BandSpring.

Figure 5: Animal band standing on top of a hill ready to welcome spring.

Neighbourhood Window[1]

The concept of *neighbourhood window* is to bring people within communities together and encourage them to share and collaborate while maintaining physical distance. Imagine a kitchen with an open window where the kitchen owner can share extra food they made and other things.

Figure 6: Neighborhood Window[1]

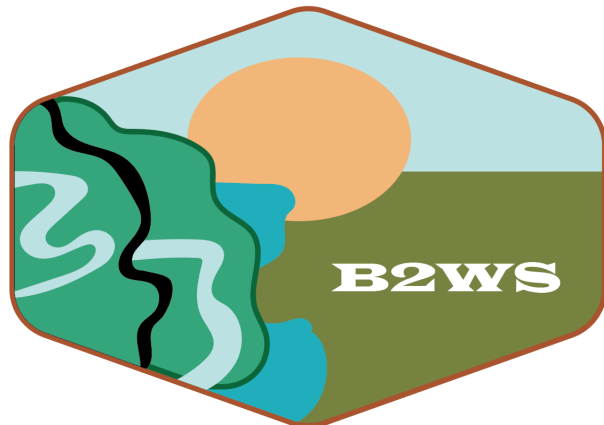# Acknowledgements

References

[1] Nick Tobier, https://everydayplaces.com

Appendix A - Structure
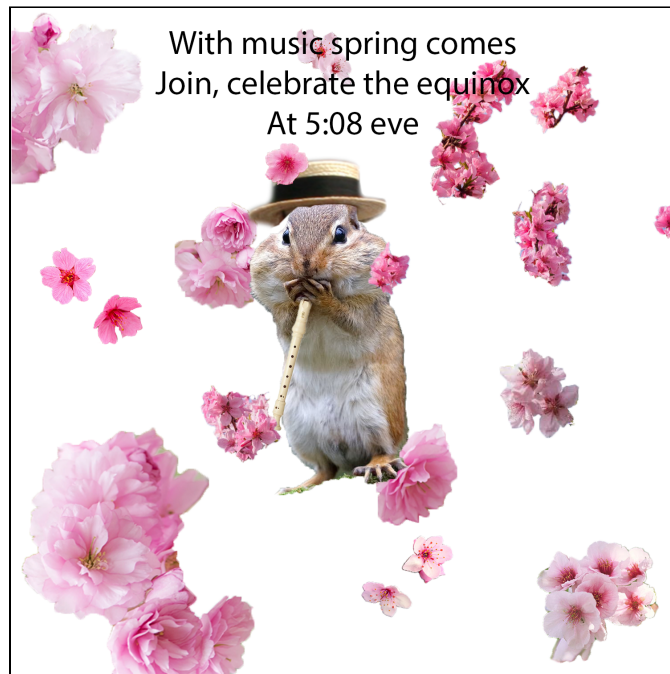
Appendix B - Flag/Patches

I created multiple patch designs based on the designs of the postcards my teammates created. The top right patch is the design we settled on and finalized to what is seen in Figure 3.

Appendix C - Postcard

I created multiple postcard designs using imagery that evokes spring ie. flowers. We also created haikus for our invitations.

As Spring time nears us
The music begins playing
Celebrate at 5

Join us to welcome spring!

5pm wherever you are

With music spring comes
Join, celebrate the equinox
At 5:08 eve

Appendix D - Uniforms

The team wore read coats to match the uniforms of the wedding band in India.