'A book with a needle'

By Megan Bennett / Journal North Reporter
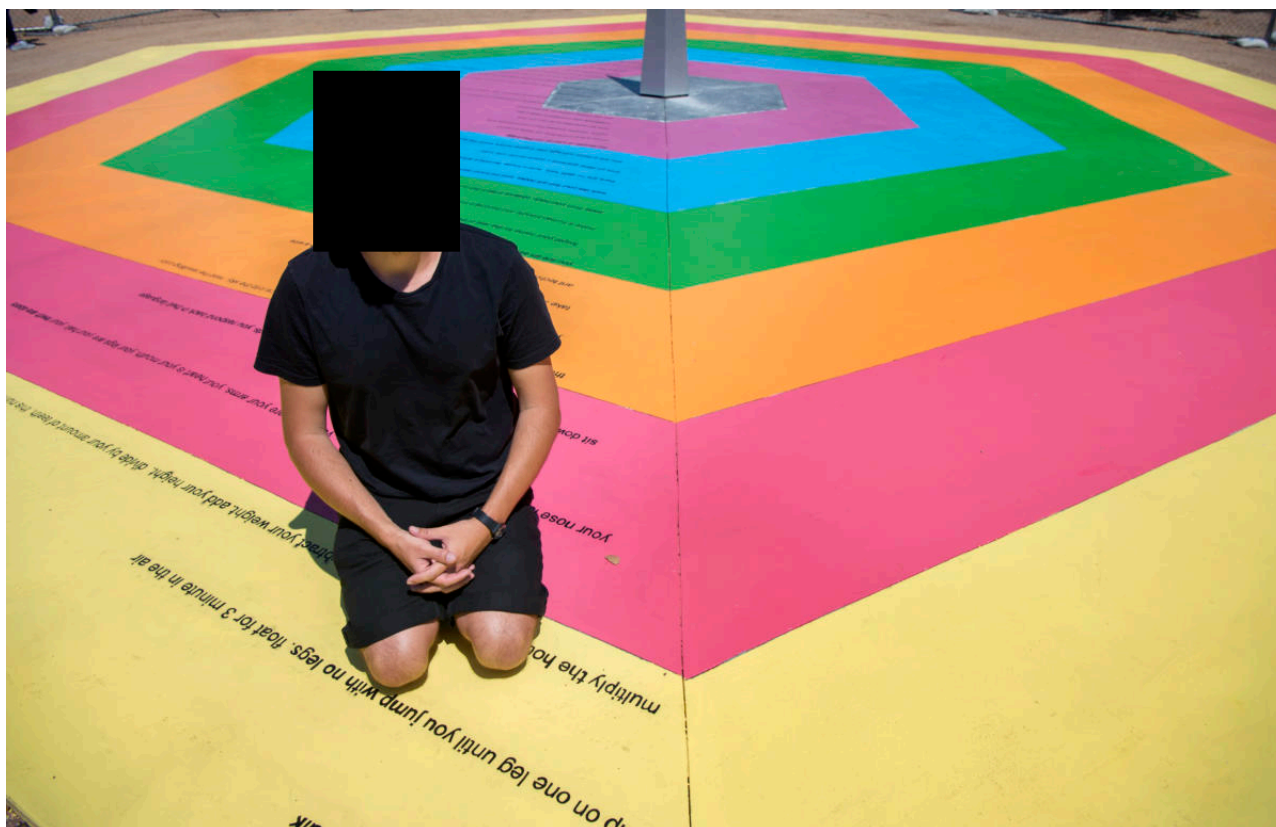
Eduardo Navarro, an artist from Buenos Aires, poses with his "Galactic Playground" installation in the Railyard Park. (Eddie Moore/Albuquerque Journal)

Here's what Eduardo Navarro gives you to work with:

"the wind is an animal. pet him."

"you are a mirror with legs. play a game only mirrors would like to play."

Navarro, an Argentinian artist, has painted dozens of these "cryptic" statements, a blend of riddles and instructions, onto a large rainbow sundial in the middle of Santa Fe's Railyard Park.

He describes his new installation, entitled "Galactic Playground," as something that can be enjoyed by humans or any other "entities" that happen to pass by.

"The idea is that anyone who is here can visualize these instructions and see what they can do with them," Navarro said. "It's like a spaceship that lands and, according to where it lands, on Earth or on different planets or in different galaxies, the rules and the shadows work differently."

The installation – 32 feet in diameter, made of concrete and painted bright yellow, red, orange, green, blue and purple – was commissioned for SITE Santa Fe's biennial show "SITELines: Casa tomada" that opens today.

Exhibitions manager Sage Sommer said "Galactic Playground" will stay up for six months in partnership with the Railyard Park Conservancy. Everyone is invited to use it for free, any time.

An installation by Eduardo Navarro titled "Galactic Playground in Santa Fe's Railyard Park is part of SITE Santa Fe's biennial show. (Eddie Moore/Albuquerque Journal)

Navarro, originally from Buenos Aires, but who now mostly resides in Basel, Switzerland, said he's long been inspired by the idea of combining "dialogue with natural phenomenon." This led him to conceptualize a large, board game-type piece that operates via the sun's movement across the sky and the changing shadows that it generates.

"(It's) like one of the players is the sun," he said.

After he pitched the idea for the sculpture in October, he visited the Jantar Mantar in New Dehli, India, a conservatory with what has been described as the largest and most accurate sundial in the world.

The needle in the middle of "Galactic Playground" creates a shadow arrow that points either directly to or near one of Navarro's instructional phrases as long as the sun is out. Which phrase depends on the location of the sun.

Before he started work, SITE conducted a six-month shadow study to determine where Navarro should paint his phrases, according to Sommer. As the seasons change, where the arrow starts and the directions it goes in will differ.

He first imagined the game with more literal instructions that would tell visitors how to maneuver the concrete rainbow. As time went on, he decided to make the piece a more interpretive experience, where kids (or anyone) playing on it can use their imaginations to decide what the phrases mean to them.

When Navarro was showing and explaining the piece during a July afternoon, the arrow was pointing to "your hands are so long they can touch the sun. bring the sun to earth." He described one written instruction,

"triplicate yourself," as his favorite.

"It's open to what they want to make out of the game," he said. "They're not rules. They're kind of like how to behave."

A few of the phases are in Spanish. Navarro translated them as "invent a game with the trees and the ants" and "a crying computer arrives from the future. Choose a color where you have tea with it and explain the present."

"It opens a door to what is a crying computer, what is the future, what is the present?" he explained.

Some visitors may want to act out the instructions. For others, he said, just imagining mentally what they could mean may be enough. But he said he purposely made the phrases poetry-like, so they can simply be read line by line.

"So it's like a book with a needle," he said. "It's like a solar book."

Contact the writer.