



**TAKE A CLASS!
TAKE A TRIP!**
page 4



**BIODIVERSITY
PARTY
4/29/23**
page 4



page 7

**DESERT
MUSEUM
ARTS
UPDATE**

**ARTS
UPDATE**
pages 7 & 8

Desert Museum

Discovery

Spring 2023



Merv Larson: A Visionary Leader 1930 – 2022

by Anne C. Warner & Craig Ivanyi, Executive Director

Merv Larson, Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum's former Executive Director, long-time employee, and exhibit designer extraordinaire passed away in August of 2022. This is a celebration of his work at the Desert Museum and his invaluable contributions to the zoo and the natural history exhibitry world- nationally and internationally.

Merv, with his wife Peggy, first arrived at the Museum on the day after Christmas, 1952 traveling over an unpaved, narrow Gates Pass Road driving a borrowed ancient pick-up and pulling an ancient borrowed horse trailer with their possessions—two desks, two chairs, a few books, some clothes, and a glass-fronted, floor-model lizard cage. Rounding the curve at the top of Gates Pass, they looked down on the saguaro-covered bajada at the place they would soon call home.

Merv was one of the first Museum employees and was charged early on with whatever Bill Carr, Museum co-founder and then-Executive Director, decided needed to be completed. He fed the animals, cleaned their habitats, repaired items, or traveled to town to pick up building materials

or animals. But his role quickly evolved as he began to design and build new enclosures for the burgeoning Museum animal population, including constructing dioramas to portray natural habitats.

Merv's design and construction work at the Museum included the Tunnel (now known as Life Underground), the Beaver exhibit (with Lew Walker), Cat Canyon, and the Cave. He greatly influenced the exhibitry industry, both directly and indirectly, as he went on to train others in his techniques including Rick Dyson, Frank Retes, and Lance Angerhofer among others.

Merv went on to become a moving force in changing zoo exhibits and oceanariums. This was clearly demonstrated in the design and construc-

...continued on page 2

...continued from cover

tion of new zoo exhibits, including Cat Canyon and the caves in the Geology Building at the Desert Museum and later Jungle World at the Bronx Zoo, the artificial tide pool for Monterey Aquarium, the Philadelphia Zoo, Sea Life Park in Hawaii and many more. One of his key design goals was to show the relationships among things in the wild – from the smallest insects to the mountain lion.

Merv was a genius at creating theater in which people gained new perspectives of the desert landscape and its wild inhabitants. His dedication to establishing an in-house design and construction team who proudly demonstrated their competence in every detail has left lasting examples that will remain as long as the Museum exists and be a steadfast tribute to the man who made these possible. **The next time you walk through the cave, or view the bighorn sheep, think of Merv!**



“Merv was an important leader and early Director of the Museum. His legacy is critical to our Museum’s history along with that of his wife, Peggy. Our reflections on the Larson history with the Museum will contribute to our efforts to shape a special future for the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum.”

-Steve Brigham, Immediate Past Chair of the Desert Museum Board of Trustees

“Merv enjoyed working with creative people. One of his talents lay in choosing good people — hiring ‘people of promise’ and leaving them alone.”

-Peggy Larson, Wife, Desert Museum Librarian & Archivist



“Merv was truly a visionary—taking the animals from cages to life-like natural environments-ASDM and the Larson Company made it happen.”

-Craig Ivanyi, Desert Museum Executive Director

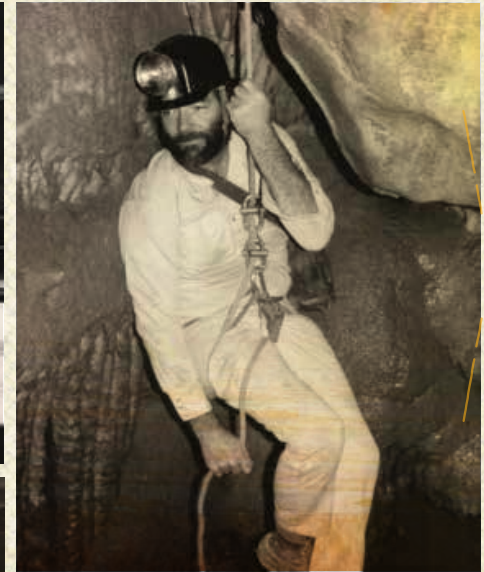


“Merv’s enlivened presence in everything he did brightened my world. He was an inspiring mentor throughout my life for which I will always be deeply grateful.”

-John Woodin, President of Woodin Construction Company, Tucson

The Desert Museum is extremely fortunate to have Merv Larson in its history. His work after leaving the Museum contributed to new standards in other institutions across America. It is the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, however, that rightly has the greatest honor of having him as a vital and essential component of its historical commitment to excellence.”

-David Hancocks, Former Desert Museum Executive Director



“I think we must recognize that our goal is to touch as many people as we can and impart to others the desire to understand, enjoy and protect the Sonoran Desert.”

-Merv Larson, Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum: 1975 Annual Report



There have been administrators across the Desert Museum’s history who played especially key roles in its standards, its progress, and its durability. Merv Larson was one of the most prominent.

A gentle man, of good humor, wise and thoughtful, an unusual mélange of artist, business entrepreneur, builder, craftsman, visionary, designer — and champion of excellence in concept and in detail. He left enduring evidence of his high standards.



Take a class! Take a trip!

For more details and to register for classes and trips: 520-883-3025 or desertmuseum.org/adultclasses.

HISTORY OF CONSERVATION & THE BIRTH OF ENVIRONMENTALISM MARCH 28 – MAY 2 (6 consecutive Tuesdays)

Join us for a lecture and discussion series exploring people's changing relationship with nature. Topics will include: The Columbian Exchange, the dawn of invasive species, *Silent Spring* and the beginning of modern environmental politics, the environment vs 'progress', urbanization, the Anthropocene, and more. Each class will cover one topic over a two-hour period. You can attend one lecture or all six. **\$30/session**



CHOLLA BUD HARVEST APRIL 15 (half day)

Participate in the centuries-old Sonoran Desert springtime ritual of harvesting cholla buds. You will learn how to de-thorn and prepare this food for longer term storage, as well as sample a few different dishes prepared with the buds. The natural history of the cholla and its sister cactus the prickly pear will be discussed, along with the health benefits of desert foods in general. **\$60**



VENOMOUS CREATURES OF THE SONORAN DESERT APRIL 20 (half day)

Learn about the few Sonoran Desert creatures that are venomous enough to be truly dangerous to people. Bust some common myths while learning how to identify medically significant species, avoid their bites and stings, and provide appropriate first aid. **\$40**



SPAIN: MOORS AND CHRISTIANS, OLIVES AND WINE Tracing the Cultural and Agricultural Roots of the Southwest SEPTEMBER 21 – OCTOBER 4

The Spanish flavor of the southwest is in fact an amalgam of Spain's previous occupants - Arabs, Jews, Visigoths, and Romans. Walk through cathedrals, markets, orchards, towns, ancient castles, and sunny beaches with an eye for the influencing factors of these peoples. Tour a rural winery during the grape harvest, sample tapas and wines, and learn to prepare paella! **\$4790**



CELEBRATING THE PEOPLE, PLANTS, AND ANIMALS OF THE SONORAN DESERT REGION.

BIODIVERSITY PARTY

**SATURDAY, APRIL 29TH
8:30 A.M. TO 5:00 P.M.
(INCLUDED WITH MUSEUM ADMISSION)**

ENJOY TALKS AND WALKS HIGHLIGHTING THE FLORA AND FAUNA OF THE MUSEUM!

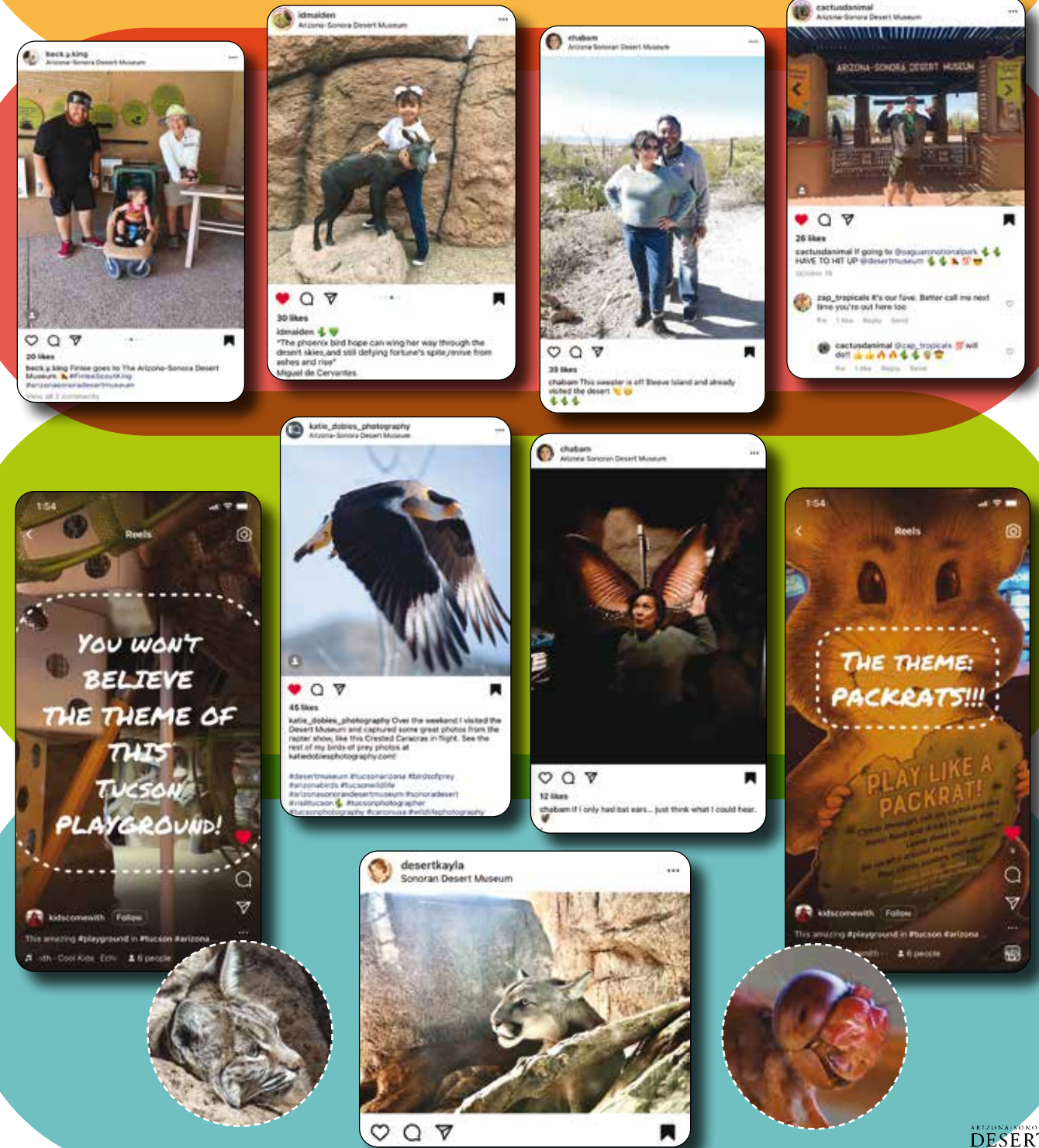
GATHER YOUR FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND FELLOW NATURE NERDS FOR A DAY OF SEARCHING, SCOUTING AND DOCUMENTING THE WILD SPECIES AT THE DESERT MUSEUM! WE WILL BIOBLITZ IN A DAY: WHAT SURPRISE ANIMALS OR PLANTS CAN YOU FIND?

DANCE TO SOME DESERT TUNES WITH MUSEUM STAFF AND MR. NATURE! IT'S OUR KID'S MUSIC ALBUM DEBUT!

DESERT MUSEUM

SOCIAL MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

We love seeing the Museum through your eyes! Tag [desertmuseum](#) and use [#desertmuseum](#) for a chance to be featured!



DONOR RECOGNITION

9/1/2022 - 12/5/2022

ARIZONA-SONORA
DESERT
MUSEUM

MAJOR DONORS +\$10,000

Stewart and Tina Christensen
Robert and Marilyn Dunnigan
Freeport-McMoRan Foundation
John Imbt

Joan E. Olafson-Smith Living Trust
Richard and Lynn McKenna
George and Rita Morgan
National Park Service,
Saguaro National Park
Duncan Paton

Priscilla & Michael Baldwin Foundation
Reinking Family Trust
David and Pam Rossetter
Susan Scholl
Donald and Glenda Seidel

The HS Lopez Family Foundation
The Institute of Museum and Library Services
Thomas R. Brown Foundation
Torrance-Potter Family Fund
Vera E. Milz Charitable Remainder Trust

IN HONOR OF

In honor of Edward Ahlgrim
James Harper

In honor of Patty Bena
Karen Findley

In honor of Dick Duffield
Amy Fletcher

In honor of Sheri Lynne Harris
Keith Harris

In honor of Schuyler Haskell
Coburn Haskell

In honor of Taryn Haslett
Laura Haslett

In honor of Ole Hedin
Robin Keith

In honor of Peggy Larson
Joan Scott and William F. Broyles

**In honor of James and
Christine Magnan**
Renee Magnan

In honor of Kelly Ratliff
Liz Gross

In honor of Owen Ribachonek
Anna Caspi

**In honor of Mildred and
Norman Truager**
Olivia Ambrose

In honor of Bill and Beth Woodin
Coburn Haskell

IN MEMORY OF
In memory of Gayle Barrios
Deborah Cataldo

In memory of Claudia Dalton
Bryan and Debra Dalton

In memory of Geraldine Dennison
Arthur Dennison

In memory of Lawrence Effken
Kathryn Grams

In memory of Queen Elizabeth
Jane Garrioch

In memory of Dr. Carlos Flores
Linda and Bruce Beeber

In memory of Alice Geesey
Brenda Geesey

In memory of Virginia Hafkemeyer
Dean and Betty Williams

In memory of Robert Hersch
Trudy Hersch

In memory of Kathryn Lance
Simon Barsky

In memory of Merv Larson
Judy and Roger Carpenter
Joan Scott and William F. Broyles
Judy Koehler

In memory of Bettie Lombard
Joan E. Minnock

In memory of Alice Manges
Edward Clinch

In memory of Charles Matson
Lisa Suarez

In memory of Betty Burch Richards
Sherryl Kay Nelson
Kathleen Stablein

In memory of Michael Scheer
Linda Saario

In memory of Jane Schurz
Anne Christine Small
Carol and Neil Weinstein
Joel Alpert

In memory of Robert Shank
Sheryle M. Shepard

In memory of Pat and Frank Turkot
Julie Kincaide

In memory of Troy Wilcox
Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum
Nextrio LLC

In memory of Jason Wright
Sharon Knies

ARIZONA-SONORA
DESERT
MUSEUM 



Arizona-Sonora
Desert Museum's

DESERT GALA

pearl anniversary • 30th annual

Join us in-person for an evening in the Sonoran Desert, showing your support for Arizona's multi-faceted zoo, aquarium, botanical garden, natural history museum, conservation entity, and Art Institute.

SUNDAY,
APRIL 30TH, 2023
4:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

For more information contact:
gala@desertmuseum.org
or call 520-883-3071



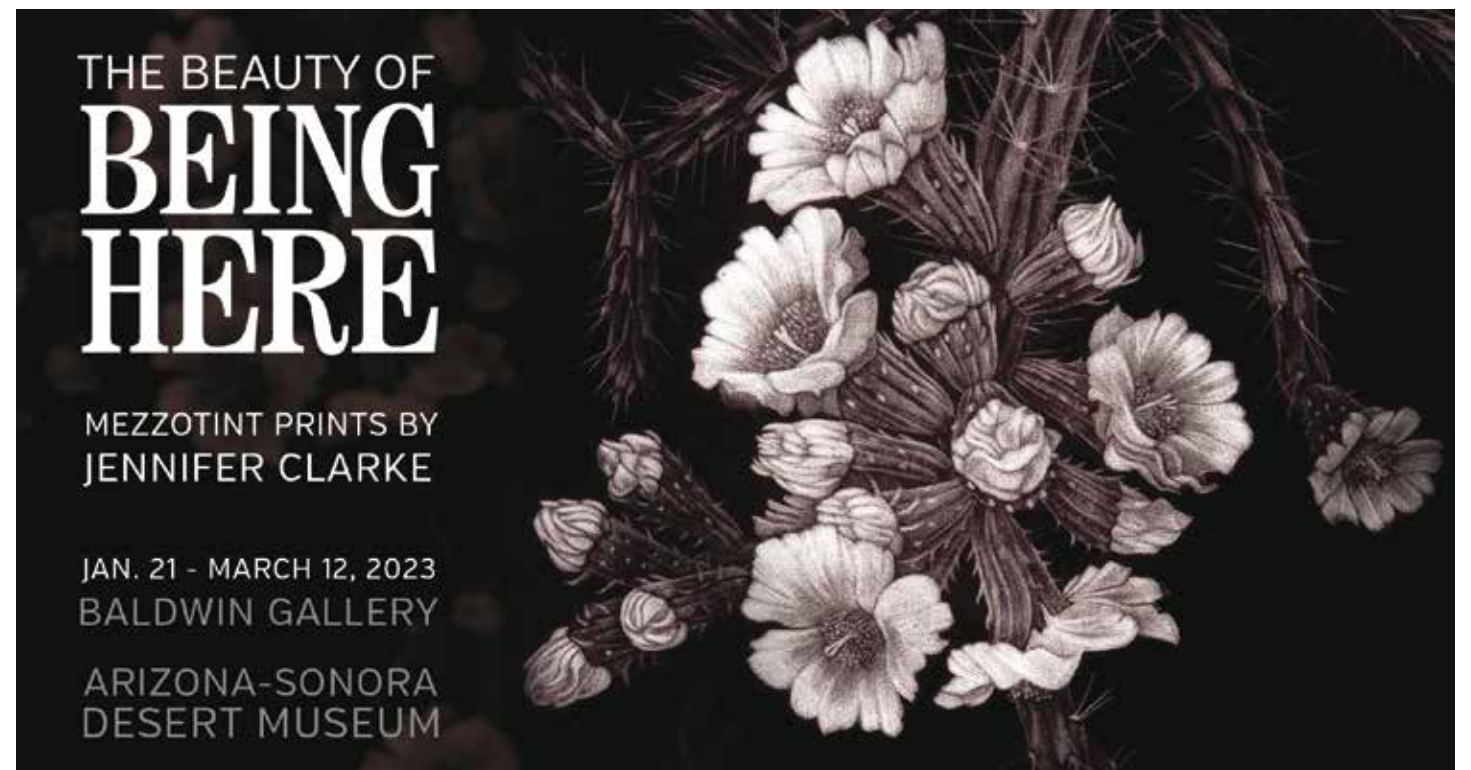
DESERT MUSEUM ARTS UPDATE

www.desertmuseumarts.com

THE BEAUTY OF BEING HERE January 21 - March 12, 2023

This very special exhibition of prints represents Jennifer Clarke's experience with the mezzotint process. "Here in the Sonoran Desert, plant life allures and repels as everything is adorned with spines and hooks. It is this contradictory beauty that is both guarded and repelling yet fragile and beckoning, that I so try to capture in my mezzotints. It is my feeling for the beauty I see that gives shape and form to the powers of light emerging from darkness. It's an endeavor which often proves to be a humbling undertaking when trying to express the exquisite beauty of this wondrous world and the gift of being here." ~ Jennifer Clarke, Artist

IRONWOOD GALLERY HOURS
Daily: 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.



THE BEAUTY OF BEING HERE

MEZZOTINT PRINTS BY
JENNIFER CLARKE

JAN. 21 - MARCH 12, 2023
BALDWIN GALLERY

ARIZONA-SONORA
DESERT MUSEUM

DESERT MUSEUM ARTS UPDATE

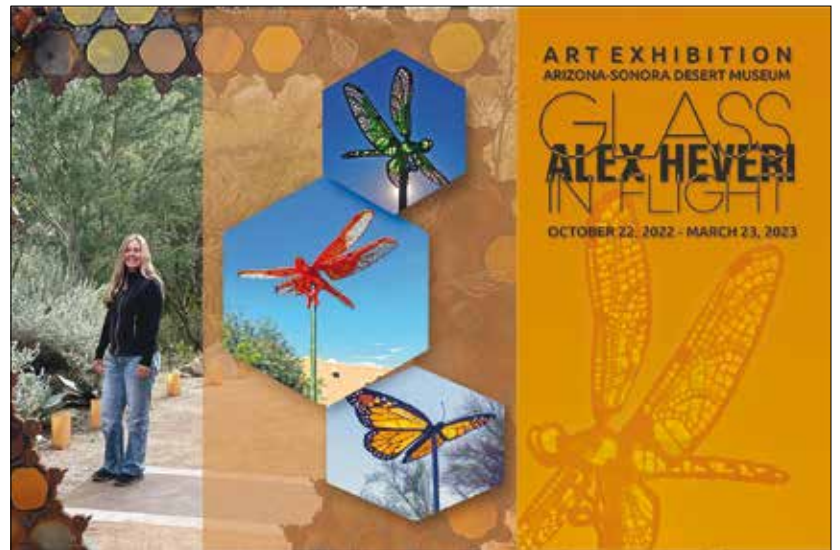
www.desertmuseumarts.com

The mission of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum is to inspire people to live in harmony with the natural world by fostering love, appreciation, and understanding of the Sonoran Desert.

GLASS IN FLIGHT: Alex Heveri

November 2022-March 2023

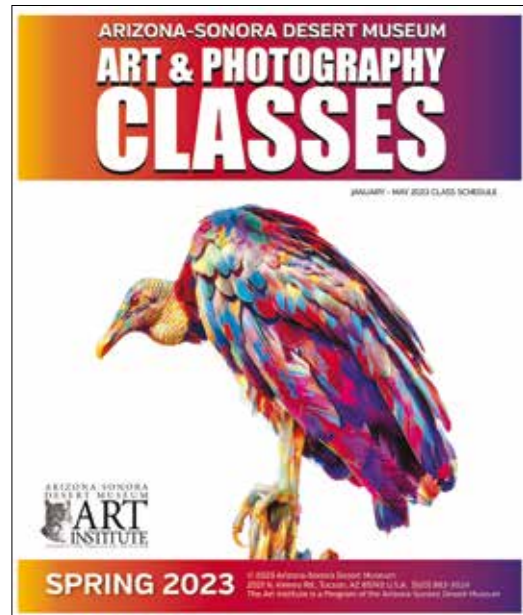
Catch it while you can! **Glass in Flight** features 21 steel and Dalle de Verre glass sculptures of gigantic, realistic insects. Created singularly by Alex Heveri, each piece captures the essence of flight. Sunlight through the stained glass mimics the transparency and iridescence of real insect wings, intensifying the illusion of movement and life. All dragonflies and some butterflies are mounted on 12-foot poles, making these towering, glittering sculptures informative, engaging and simply enchanting. These sculptures are placed around the grounds of the Museum. *Take a photo and use hashtag #glassinflight and be entered to win a prize! Visit desertmuseumarts.com for details.*



WINTER/SPRING CLASSES

January - May, 2023
Discover your talent!

Enjoy the surroundings at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum while working on an art project. We offer individual classes as well as a certificate of completion program in nature art. The unique backdrop of the Museum becomes your classroom, while you have the option of drawing birds, mammals, insects and desert botanicals. You can also participate in a wide variety of classes and workshops including oil painting, nature journaling, mixed media, and photography. Join us! Sign up at: desertmuseumarts.com



Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum
2021 N Kinney Rd., Tucson, AZ 85743-9719
Phone (520) 883-2702 · Fax (520) 883-2500
www.desertmuseum.org

The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum is a non-profit organization. No part of this newsletter may be used without permission. All rights reserved. ©2022

Editor: Catherine Bartlett
Design & Layout: Nancy Serensky
Photo Credits: Rhonda Spencer, staff photos

The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum is located on the ancestral lands of the Tohono O'odham (Desert People).