Art, Blue Bridge and Ben Clore
Exploring the ABCs of ArtPrize
Have you heard about ArtPrize?

**ARTPRIZE IS A GRAND RAPIDS-based social experiment for artists that engages the public and has awarded nearly $500,000 each year to prize winners. It is structured as an interactive event that encourages the public to participate in the selection of ten winning artists. Registered visitors have the opportunity to vote online or via text message for the artists they like best, selecting 10 winning artists, with the artist garnering the most votes taking the $250,000 ArtPrize.**

For the past two years, more than 155 venues, including an MSU gallery in 2009 and the Blue Bridge in 2010, exhibited artwork by more than 1,300 artists from around the world in the city’s downtown region. The Michigan State University exhibitions in 2009 and 2010 were sponsored by the College of Arts & Letters and the Department of Art and Art History. For the 2009 competition, MSU’s College of Human Medicine was a co-sponsor. In 2009, the MSU gallery featured 31 artists with connections to MSU – students, alumni and faculty. For 2010, CAL and the Department of Art and Art History took another tack. Tucked inside Grand Rapids’ oldest railroad bridge, The Blue Bridge, is a wooden railroad car, made by local workers with lumber from a local construction company. The bridge is now a walkway in the heart of downtown, but thanks to curatorial work by Michigan State University’s Department of Art and Art History, the ArtPrize venue captivated passersby. It was created by MSU master of fine arts graduate Ben Clore, one of more than 1,700 artists who competed in the second year of the ArtPrize competition, September 22 – October 10, 2010.

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“The profile of the Grand Rapids art scene has seen an extraordinary rise since the introduction of ArtPrize last year,” said MSU College of Arts and Letters Dean Karin A. Wurst. “Michigan State University has a long and illustrious history as a deeply engaged public institution, and we were pleased to again participate in the ArtPrize community in this, its second year.”

Serving as one of the ArtPrize curators provided an added and valued dimension to the process for the Art and Art History Department. And curating the Blue Bridge venue offered heightened exposure.

“The department’s curatorial selection reflects MSU’s commitment to community engagement and situating art as part of the public conversation,” said Michelle Word, teaching specialist in the Art and Art History Department. “As such, we were pleased to again participate in the ArtPrize community and to have selected a public work that celebrates the history, present and future of one of Michigan’s most vibrant communities.”

Clore’s work, “Reconstructed,” is a tribute to the railroad industry’s influence on Grand Rapids.

“It was important to utilize as much local industry as possible, so that whatever money was spent on the project was going directly back into the community,” Clore said.

Clore met with second graders at Sibley Elementary School in Grand Rapids just prior to the public opening. He then gave them a tour of his piece.

Most of Clore’s project was underwritten by Grand Rapids-based Universal Forest Products Inc., a holding company that provides capital, management and administrative resources to subsidiaries that design, manufacture and market wood and wood-alternative products for various industries.

“ArtPrize is an exciting and important event that is having a tremendous impact on our community and we were pleased to play a role,” said Universal CEO Michael B. Glenn. “The Blue Bridge was a perfect venue for us: As a manufacturing company with operations and customers across North America, we’ve relied on rail for 55 years. We also were pleased to showcase our engineering and manufacturing capabilities by assisting Ben with his project.”

Clore’s father and grandfather were carpenters, so woodworking is in his blood, Clore said.

“The thing I love about ArtPrize is that so many artists are actively working while the community watches,” he said. “So often in a gallery, you only see the final results. But here, people can actually walk on the work and become part of the artwork itself.”

For more information about the project and “Reconstructed,” visit Clore’s blog at: www.bluebridgeproject.com

For more info about ArtPrize, visit the web site at www.artprize.org