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Yarnbomber

Santa Barbara artist targets nature with temporary installations

By DAVE MASON, NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER
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Hikers on the Lizard's Mouth trail in the Santa Ynez Mountains stopped in their tracks.

They stared in amazement at the 18 boulders, wrapped in various crocheted and knitted patterns, including the American flag. It was an explosion of color on nature's beige, rocky canvas in the area above Goleta.

The Yarnbomber was here.

His name is Stephen Duneier, a 47-year-old Santa Barbara hedge fund manager. The Brooklyn native, who has spent his career in

finance, learned to knit and crochet on a path that started with a New Year's resolution and led him to social media, where he became known as the Yarnbomber.

Mr. Duneier's marks have included Cold Spring Trail, where he wrapped a tree in a patchwork of yarn, to Sasquatch Cave in Lizard's Mouth, where he used yarn to spin an intricate spider web. His goal is to draw people into nature by detonating the massive projects.

But the Yarnbomber's biggest drop was wrapping yarn around the Lizard's Mouth boulders in early June.

"For that project, I put it out on the Internet that I was collecting pieces," said Mr. Duneier, who documents his work at www.yarnbomber.com (he can also be found at www.facebook.com/yarnbombs and uses the handle "yarnbombs" on Instagram).

"It wounded us getting 288 (knitted and

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I wound up getting 368 (knitted and crocheted) contributions from 36 countries and all 50 states plus D.C. Somebody sent me a 9-foot-long (knitted) scene of the Colorado mountains."

"One woman made a giant, binary image of Super Mario, which was a huge hit. Another woman from Holland made a really intricate eye. There was Hello Kitty, bumble bees and a flag that was 10 feet across," Mr. Duneier said. "Most of it was pretty abstract."

The results at Lizard's Mouth exceeded the dreams of Mr. Duneier, who graduated in 1985 from J.P. Taravella High School in Coral Springs, Fla., and worked as a stockbroker before earning a bachelor's degree in finance and economics in 1992 at Florida Atlantic University. Two years later, he got a master's degree in business administration at New York University.

After working as a derivatives trader in Scarsdale, N.Y., he moved with his family to London in 2000 and managed hedge funds there. Six years later, they relocated to Santa Barbara, which seemed an ideal place to raise their two kids.

When Mr. Duneier got here, he hit all the trails, one of his New Year's resolutions. He

liked it so much, he became an avid hiker.

"Each year, I do some sort of odd resolution," said Mr. Duneier, who's married to Barbara Duneier, a third-grade teacher at Monroe Elementary School, and has a son, Jackson, 18, and daughter, Masie, 20. "In 2012, it was the year to learn 12 new things, as well as do 12 charitable things not involving writing a check. My wife suggested I learn knitting."

Mr. Duneier recalled his first project: a scarf gone wrong. "I was horrible at it!"

But then he heard about the international trend of yarn bombing, which involves temporarily wrapping objects in public areas in knitted or crocheted yarn, resulting in colorful displays. Typically, yarn bombers target urban areas, focusing on, say, sign poles, as a way to beautify them.

One day in 2012, as Mr. Duneier sat under a tall eucalyptus tree on the Cold Spring Trail in the Montecito and Santa Barbara foothills, he thought about that bombed scarf — and then about yarn bombing. It wasn't long before he was knitting again — and asking for submissions from others.

"Eighty-two days later, the tree was covered in yarn, and that was the beginning of my yarn bombing," he said.

Mr. Duneier, who rented a ladder and borrowed three friends for the installation of it, left the yarn on the tree for nine days, which became the typical timeframe for his projects. "People's response to it was amazing. I would hike up at least once every day and listen to people's reactions when they first saw it. Everyone was blown away by it.

"A few days later, as I was coming up, people found out I was the guy who did it," he said. "I had women hugging me with tears in their eyes, thanking me for doing it." Soon, others posted photos of the tree on the Internet.

Mr. Duneier thought that was the end of his yarn bombing, but fate decided otherwise.

A San Diego yarn bomber, among those who had sent him crocheted pieces for the Cold Spring Trail tree, needed his help. So in 2013, he learned how to crochet from

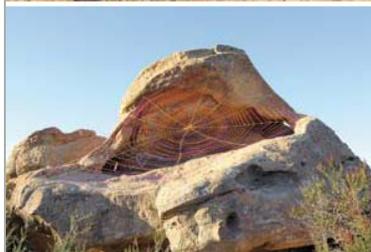


Top photo, Yarnbomber Stephen Duneier relaxes on one of the 18 boulders he covered with yarn in early June at Lizard's Mouth. At top, Mr. Duneier's yarn bombing started when he wrapped this eucalyptus tree on Cold Spring Trail in the Montecito and Santa Barbara foothills in 2012.

SCOTTLONDON.COM PHOTO

Bottom photo, Stephen Duneier says he started yarn bombing as a means of attracting people to local trails.

CARMEN SMYTH/NEWS-PRESS



Top photo, Mr. Duneier draped crocheted and knitted patterns and images on 18 boulders at Lizard's Mouth in early June.

COURTESY SUSAN BELL PHOTOGRAPHY

Bottom photo, A spider web took over Sasquatch Cave in the Lizard's Mouth area.

YARNBOMBER.COM PHOTO

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the Internet and created several squares for her.

"Crocheting was actually relaxing for me. I got hooked on it," he said.

His yarn bombing projects in 2013 included wrapping a fake tree inside a Peabody Charter Elementary School classroom and a boulder on Saddlerock Trail in Montecito.

Last February, he and his friends hung a giant sunburst, made of reflective yarn, 40

feet above Seven Falls Trail, just outside Santa Barbara. The installation involved some risky rock climbing but was worth it, he said. "It looked pretty amazing. Essentially, it was a circle in the middle with sun beams and different colors of the rainbow."

Mr. Duneier's yarn bombing soon got a boost from social media. His fame started with his blog, in which he, in part, posted a video of his humorous effort to learn how to unicycle. That was picked up by WordPress, an online blogging platform, and the Internet hits for his unicycle video soared to 15,000. That's how people found the link to his blog, where he mentioned yarn bombing.

In September 2013, he started a website about his yarn bombing and supplemented that with a Facebook page and Instagram posts. "I'm now up to 10,000 followers on Instagram, 13,000 total on social media. Fifteen thousand visitors come to my website each month."

That enabled him to receive crocheted and knitted donations from around the world for his Lizard's Mouth project, which took up most of his time so far this year. He became so well-known that a hiker at Lizard's Mouth shouted at him, "Hey, Yarnbomber! I follow you on Instagram."

"Suddenly people were coming up and saying, 'I've been following you for months. I love what you're doing,' " he said.

He's now planning a project involving yarn and other media with The Arts Fund in Santa Barbara, but declined to say what or where it will be. Details are still being worked out.

"It's kind of an odd thing to be a yarn bomber," said the financier-turned-artist. "My family, my kids, my parents have been to all of them, and they still can't get their heads around this whole idea. To me, it's sort of a natural progression to something I started."

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FYI

For more about Stephen Duneier, aka the Yarnbomber, go to www.yarnbomber.com, www.facebook.com/yarnbombs and [yarnbombs](https://www.instagram.com/yarnbombs) in Instagram.



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