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HUBweek brings interactive art to Boston

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HUBweek 2017, which was centered at City Hall Plaza, featured interactive art installations such as Place/Setting and The Enchanted Forest. / Photo by Patrick Leung

By Eirin Combs, news correspondent

HUBweek kicked off its third year of celebrating innovation in the Greater Boston area from Oct. 10 to 15. With hundreds of speakers and events, there were many ways for the community to get involved in a collaborative experience.

Some of the events included the Future Forum, where leaders in varying industries showcased their future plans, Demo Day, a networking and workshop event for startups and Immersion, a live arts experience.

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A variety of industries and topics were represented at these events, including biotech and biodesign, political influence on innovation, technological advancements and climate and the economy.

HUBweek also hosted a panel with CNN political commentator Van Jones and WBUR's Tom Ashbrook; a discussion with Anne Finucane, the vice chairman of Bank of America and Social Finance CEO and Co-Founder Tracy Palandjian. These discussions took place in Boston's City Hall Plaza.

The heart of the festival was located in the Plaza, where Immersion transformed the plaza with geodesic domes, interactive art installations, panels and more.

One event that brought a group of people in similar industries together was called Place/Setting, organized by French 2D, an architecture firm in Boston. The event was a part of a series of meals at HUBweek intended to spark public dialogue.

One of the co-founders of French 2D, Jenny French, said the guests at four of these public meals addressed issues of income inequality in Boston, and each provided a unique take on the topic.

"We have invited 10 to 12 guests to each meal to have conversations about their specific fields of work," French said. "They are all people from different grassroots or institutional backgrounds who might be working on the same topic but from completely different perspectives or with different motivations."

They created this space with the goal of opening up important conversations not only to the people in these fields, but for the public to observe the conversations as well. Because these conversations, which would usually happen behind closed doors, were now taking place at an outdoor table, anyone could listen.

Another interactive art installation was the Enchanted Forest, which took place on the Government Center promenade. It was primarily a nighttime event and focused on hands-on activities for all ages.

"It was to show how trees connect us with aspects of healthy living in the city," said Fish McGill, one of the Enchanted Forest's collaborators.

Saul Baizman and Andrew Ringler created the installation along with McGill. The three innovators worked on environmental art projects in the past and proposed the Enchanted Forest installation because they saw the focus of HUBweek was related to environmentalism, which aligned with their mission.

"The Enchanted Forest was kind of a respite from the intensity of being downtown, and a moment of pause from all the amazing stimulation of HUBweek," McGill said.

Philip Gedarovich, a motion graphics designer, created another interactive art experience for the public to participate in at Immersion.

"This is an interactive piece of artwork here called "Try Me," which takes the human form and turns into kind of a triangulated origami figure," Gedarovich said.

HUBweek was a very diverse experience which featured many other events that were spread out throughout the Greater Boston area. Because it was a week-long event, attendees of HUBweek were able to spend time everywhere.

The accessibility and interactive nature of the festival resonated with one of the attendees, Catherine Maldonado, a member of the Boston community who came to the event after a friend encouraged it.

"It's really cool that there's so many different presenters, and it's a great way to engage people," Maldonado said.

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