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Making a Splash

A local couple with boundless creativity plants a piece of art downtown.

By **Danielle Paquette**, Times Staff Writer

Hoisting the 10-foot flower stem, Gus and Lina Ocamposilva uttered breathy, one-word commands.

"Higher!"

"Lower!"

"Here?"

"Here."

On Wednesday morning, as a farmer's market drew crowds downtown, the couple and two city employees worked slowly, methodically to plant a giant metal tulip in a Cleveland Street median.

It's the 13th contemporary sculpture to be displayed in the downtown medians and is the first created by local married artists. City officials chose Tulip, which will remain for a year, to modernize the downtown area and add a splash of culture.

The 700-pound blue and yellow flower sculpture takes about two hours to assemble. Yellow bars for extra reinforcement resemble wispy tributary leaves.

Passers-by stared as Lina, atop a ladder, power-drilled into a petal.

"That looks neat," a woman walking to work said. "Like a giant pair of pliers."

Gus and Lina Ocamposilva, weld nature-inspired sculptures in their Clearwater backyard, melting aluminum while discussing Salvador Dalí and the meaning behind V for Vendetta.



[JIM DAMASKE | Times]

Gus and Lina Ocamposilva brace the tulip sculpture they installed Wednesday on Cleveland Street. The Clearwater couple have had a plethora of public art on display in the country and in Colombia.

Beneath the orange trees, they twist metal scraps into dolphin tails, bird wings and cat paws.

The couple wanted to work together, so they found a way, self-taught, 10 years ago: He aims the welding torch. She paints the surfaces of the sculptures. Some days, vice versa.

Gus, who studied painting in Barcelona, didn't sculpt metal until he moved to Florida. He wanted something to withstand hurricane gusts.

A Colombia native, Gus started as an oil painter. He was searching for a muse when he met Lina, a ballerina, in Colombia.

She was strong-willed and sassy with a beauty difficult to capture on canvas. Gus painted her again and again, in cool blues, fiery reds, as a grinning child, pirouetting onstage, sprawled naked on a leather couch.

They fell in love, left the country and marched into an Orlando courthouse — he dressed in white, she in black. They giggled through the wedding ceremony. Their only wedding gift: the American dream.

A decade ago, the Ocamposilvas bought a pink ranch house on Clearwater's south side.

They decorated the living room with clay figurines, 12 portraits of Lina, and miniature versions of their work in New York City, Los Angeles, Atlanta — wherever a person or city may commission them.

They're always creating something — or going crazy, as Gus says. They've devoted weeks to the latest project: painting human models into butterflies and mermaids.

Sometimes, for art, they spend money before they have it. They don't hesitate to deplete emergency funds for a new shed, a new tool. They call it "destino suicida," or suicidal fate. Leaping before looking.

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After two hours of climbing, hammering, polishing, bolting, unbolting and rebolting, the couple removed their gloves.

"Oof," said Lina, exhausted.

The tulip looks good downtown, she thought. Beneath a clear sky, it's well positioned to catch sun rays. And from one angle, the green glass SunTrust building is a great backdrop, complementing the blue petals.

Now, the couple could go home, sip fresh orange juice and pack for California. They plan to install No Limits, an abstract sculpture of two acrobats, Monday in Palm Desert.

It's technically a business trip, but the Ocamposilvas will sightsee, make new friends, maybe go dancing.

Art and joy, they believe, can't be separated.

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