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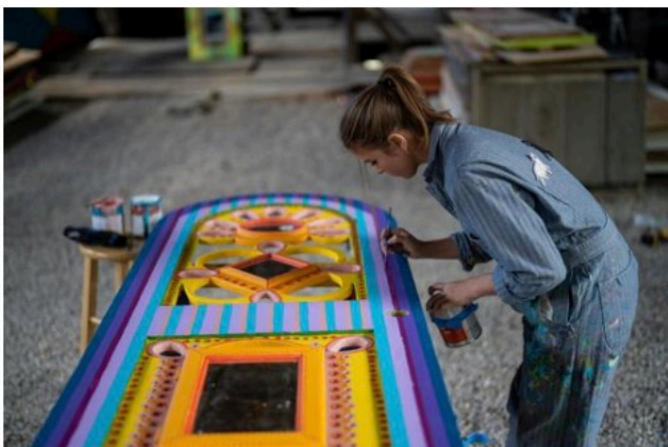
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### 'The Unknown Zone'

Artist Brooke Einbender aims to bridge gap between physical and virtual worlds

By Eva Thomas, Staff Reporter Jan 6, 2022



Multidisciplinary artist, Brooke Einbender, works on one of twenty doors during her residency at Silver Bell Mine in Ophir. (Photo courtesy of Kyle Wavra)

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Local artist Brooke Einbender, the person behind Mindbender Art, is one of many talented, passionate and creative souls that grace the streets of Telluride. In fact, after living in New York City, she moved to Telluride because of the arts community. According to her website, Einbender views herself as a "leading pioneer in the exploration of XR art (extended reality art) and community-based VR (virtual reality) collaboration."

Through her art, Einbender connects the physical world with the virtual world. Her work transports viewers into an entirely other dimension one can only dream of entering.

"It is bridging the physical and virtual realms and exploring these new cutting-edge mediums and to go where no one has gone before," Einbender said.

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Einbender embodies the term "multidisciplinary artist." A multidisciplinary artist combines different art forms to create something that is difficult to define, for there are so many facets and disciplines that go into making a piece. She is unlimited, which can sometimes be hard to grasp.

In March-June 2020, Einbender held her first exhibit in Telluride. "The Unknown Zone," at the previous Gallery 81435. On the walls of the gallery were oil paintings done by Einbender. But they weren't just any ordinary paintings. They were "augmented reality paintings." Using smartphones, guests could scan the paintings, similar to using a QR code, and enter into the painting's world. Einbender had rendered a new experience for each work in virtual reality. Through the phones, the paintings literally jumped off of the canvas.

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paintings literally jumped out of the canvases.

One thing to note about Einbender is that she refuses to be placed inside a box, just like her art. She does not create sketches prior to her work. She trusts her inner-self to guide her paintbrush, as well as her day-to-day life. "The Unknown Zone" project reflects this mode of operation. But did not end in June 2020 with the exhibit, for the project does not have an end date.

In the midst of the exhibit, the whole world shut down due to the pandemic. Lockdowns caused Einbender to reflect and contemplate what she truly wanted to express through "The Unknown Zone."

While scrolling through the Telluride Sweet Deals Facebook page during that period, Einbender saw a post for free doors. She was immediately drawn to the post, for she saw more than just a wooden monolith.

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"We're isolated as a collective, on a global scale, all behind closed doors. Personal transformations are taking place, whether dark or light. People are quitting their jobs and learning a new skill and stepping into their own power. ... We're each experiencing these private moments, all behind closed doors," Einbender said.

The rest of 2020 was especially difficult for Einbender. After suffering a severe concussion, her life was put on hold. She was unsure of what would happen next.

"For me, my door 'closing and opening' was in 2020. During the pandemic, I got a really bad concussion, and I was out for five months. I lost my job. At the moment, I thought, 'Oh, my God, what's going to happen?' But looking back, I hit my head in the right way because that was the moment that led me to pursue art full-time. Without that push from the universe, I wouldn't have taken that leap," Einbender said.

During that time, she decided the next chapter for "The Unknown Zone" would revolve around doors. At first, Einbender started collecting doors, but eventually, they started coming to her. Free doors would appear on the porch of her studio, and people started reaching out to Einbender when they had doors to donate.

"Each door has been gifted to me by someone in the community," she added.

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In July 2021, Einbender, who has no experience in carpentry, picked up power tools and set off to transform the doors. She started an art residency with friend and fellow artist Sarah Lewiecki in Silver Bell Mines near Ophir.

During the two-plus-month residency, Einbender completed 20 doors. Ten of the doors were painted like the oil paintings from the 2020 exhibit and suspended inside the mine. She used lights to illuminate the doors. Five of the doors she painted gray and then projected animated videos she had rendered onto the wooden canvases.

Lewiecki, who focuses on painting and woodworking, found the mines to be the perfect space for both their respective art forms, and she enjoyed working with her longtime friend.

"Working outdoors in a large space was a great aspect of the Ophir residency. ... Brooke's work is highly meticulous. I really enjoy her patterning because it is intuitive and colorful, especially with respect to the geometry she layers and repeats on doors in 'The Unknown Zone' series," Lewiecki said.

Lewiecki's art can be found on Instagram (@svnlew\_studio).

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Einbender's goal for "The Unknown Zone" is to complete 100 doors by the end of 2022. Ideally, she would love to do an exhibit in and around Telluride. She envisions combining the doors with the augmented reality aspect of her original oil paintings. For example, she explained, the doors would stand alone in a steel frame, and through a smartphone, when the door opened, one could physically walk through and enter the world Einbender rendered. The doors would be like a portal, which is a recurring theme throughout Einbender's work.

Currently, Einbender sells non-fungible token (NFTs) versions of her doors and even has some physical doors for sale. But she emphasized the project would not exist without the local community.

"What has been so incredible about this project is I couldn't have done it without the Telluride community. Everyone has been so kind at lending their gifts in any way they can, whether it's photography skills, a pickup truck to move the doors, studio space, gifting me doors. It's turned into something so much bigger than me," Einbender said.

To learn more about Einbender and her doors, or to donate, visit [theunknownzone.com](https://theunknownzone.com) or follow her on Instagram (@mindbender.art).

