

Wednesday, June 17, 2009

# CITIZEN JOURNALISM: Decade-old Artomatic celebrates D.C. artists

John Muller SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON TIMES

## CITIZEN JOURNALISM:

The District's indigenous cultural and artistic contributions historically have been overlooked, not just by out-of-towners, but also by those who work, live and play in the city, Tim Slayton and other local artists often contend.

Still, they can count on the annual Artomatic. The massive public art exhibition, which primarily showcases the works of D.C.

artists, moved last month to an undeveloped office building near the Nationals Park.

"Artomatic serves as a way to unite the artistic and business community in Washington by bringing thousands of art lovers to neighborhoods across the District that they might not normally go to," said Annalisa Meyer, a volunteer with the decade-old nomadic exhibit.

"This year, we have the opportunity to be in this phenomenal building... in D.C.'s Capitol Riverfront neighborhood, a vibrant new mixed-use community and riverfront destination that is so much more than the ballpark," Ms. Meyer said.

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When you step inside Artomatic 2009, any pretensions you may have about the highbrow art world can be checked at the door.

Artomatic aims to be welcoming for anyone to enjoy at his or her leisure and discretion. There are nine floors overflowing with creative works from emerging and established artists. The displays range from an exhibition with more than 30 dioramas, a scene in a shoe box portraying Easter marshmallow Peeps in various situations, to landscape paintings, live music and performances.

Artists also teach free classes on-site.

"Artomatic is a place for discovery," said founder and Executive Director George C. Koch.

On the night of its May 29 grand opening, more than 5,500 visitors from across the region and country discovered the richness of a gallery with open access to all artistic endeavors, Artomatic officials estimated. They project they will draw upward of 70,000 visitors this season, which runs through July 5.

Mr. Slayton, 25, a 2005 graduate of Howard University, has an exhibit reminiscent of the "Borf" graffiti crimes that occurred in 2004 and 2005. Titled "Truth Among Liars," it is a political statement that "speaks directly to the grittiness of D.C.," Mr. Slayton said.

"I think it is a great thing to be in the new developing area for the city," he said. "I love the juxtaposition of the stadium next to the 'superdome' of art exhibits. This is also great for the new area, because I feel like oftentimes when new areas are developed, the art is forgotten, especially the public art."

A part-time artist who works for the local eco-vending company On the Fly, Mr. Slayton first visited Artomatic in 2001 after hearing about it from friends. His work was featured in a previous Artomatic installation.

Artomatic was born in the District with its first public installation in 1999 at the historic Manhattan Laundry building on Florida Avenue Northwest. That space was donated by Douglas Development Corp.

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Now celebrating its 10th anniversary, Artomatic has become influential in its scope and depth for local artists as it has traveled to all quadrants of the city, Mr. Koch said.

Artomatic is open from Wednesday through Sunday at various hours. All artwork can be purchased.

One of the more innovative works this year is the "GO DC Metro!" installation by first-time Artomatic participant Nataliya Andreyeva. Originally from Ukraine, she has lived in the District since 2002 and describes herself as a "Metromaniac."

Her exhibit is an interpretive take on the Metro and the history behind the origins of its five mass-transit routes.

Her piece about the Red Line juxtaposes the line's opening in 1976 with America's Bicentennial celebration. The exhibit about the Green Line, which opened in 1991, includes images related to the Persian Gulf War, the riots in Mount Pleasant and the Battle of Fort Stevens during the American Civil War.

Ms. Andreyeva is working with the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities as well as Metro's arts manager about possibly highlighting her individual work or collaborating with other city artists to create a mural at a Metro station.

"I wanted riders and visitors to see that all these things - Metro, bus, jobs - are not simply given to us as is, but were created years ago through wars, different presidents, achievements in science and social justices and the like," she said.

- John Muller is a writer living in Montgomery County.