

An art festival with a unique twist in Montgomery County

Wide ranging artists, creative ideas - an event like no other.



Recycled bottles help to create a colorful pinata.
(Photo credit: Eric Rasch)



Urban inspired art make great conversation starters.
(Photo credit: Eric Rasch)

By Mirchaye Sahl

“By artists, for everyone” is Artomatic’s mission, a five-week long art festival in Montgomery County, Maryland.

This year’s event, featuring more than 350 artists, commenced November 3 and will go through December 9 in Potomac, MD.

Artomatic is a volunteer-run arts festival. It is best known for hosting raw art in the DC metropolitan area every 12 to 18 months. It usually takes place in a commercial site slated for demolition or in a newly constructed space.

“These spaces are designed to be temporary because Washington has never had an industrial base, so we don’t have warehouses to recycle like we do in Chicago or LA,” said George Koch, founder of Artomatic, Inc.

With a degree in Ceramics and Design, Koch decided to get involved in arts in the 1970’s. He started looking for small spaces to work in, but that wasn’t easy as most spaces were rented in full and not according to the artist’s necessity.

“So that got me involved in creating an artist incubator,” Koch said.

Artomatic held its first show in 1999 in the Manhattan Laundry buildings on Florida Avenue in Washington, DC and since then has attracted artists from all over the world.

Koch explained what makes Artomatic so unique compared to other art platforms. “A lot of artist cooperatives focus on what kind of art you do and what you’re about. Here, we don’t jury anybody we’re open to anyone that wants to show their work,” he said.

Artomatic allows the artist to select what art they want to showcase and the visitors can make their own interpretation about it; “Visitors are their own curator here,” Koch said.

The art festival is completely run by volunteers and has no paid staff. “What we want is pretty simple - it’s to build a community among artists,” he said.

Suzanne Shelden, one of the volunteer artists, purchased a 6 foot wall to showcase her art this year. “Every art here is fascinating,” she said referring to the artwork she and her fellow volunteer artists worked on.

“We work 12-15 hours over the course of the months to make sure we answer any questions visitors might have,” Shelden added.

Carlos is another volunteer artist that showcased his work at this year’s Artomatic. The art festival helped him make a lot of connections last year and he came back for more.

“This is my second Artomatic show. We get a wide range of different crowds coming to see our work and it’s a great exposure,” he said.

Koch explained that artists have a high network opportunity at Artomatic compared to other galleries. “Artists here see all kinds of people and make all kind of friends,” he said.

Artomatic is encouraging artists from all over the world to participate in future events. “We’re working on a more international Artomatic,” Koch said.

Artomatic is open free of charge for the public from Thursday through Sunday until December 9. For more info on hours and location visit <http://www.artomatic.org/park-potomac-2016/>.