

Minnesota Women's Press

Changing the Universe through Women's Stories

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Three women and an art festival

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by Maria Burns

Unable to find a niche in the Twin Cities arts festival scene, Mary Ann Wunderlin decided that she needed to carve out her own. So the woodworker joined with photographers Pat Parnow and Carol Haubner—friends from the festival circuit—to start the Loring Park Art Festival.

The three women, who have been involved in art shows for decades, worked with artists and city officials to put together the first festival, which was held in 2000 and featured 110 painters, photographers, sculptors, woodworkers, jewelry makers and other artists.

This year the number of exhibitors has grown to 130 artists, but that is the capacity of the festival, according to Parnow. The founders don't want the festival to get any bigger. Being small is something they consider an asset: each artist has the opportunity and space to display work without being crowded or overwhelmed.

Instead of increasing the number of participants, the festival's organizers have become more selective in choosing artists. This year there were nearly 250 applicants for the festival. Jurors made their decisions based on the quality of the artists' work, keeping in mind the need for a variety of mediums.

Art, work

Wunderlin, Parnow and Haubner work together well. Although they are very different, all have "little pieces that just seem to knit." As a result, they have each contributed to the success of the festival. Parnow designed the postcards and other promotional information. Haubner handles internet promotions. Wunderlin, a self-described people-person, meets with the community and city on planning issues. Each woman is also an accomplished artist.

However, even with help from festival staff and volunteers, Parnow admits that putting on the festival is hard work. "It's a lot more than we planned," she said. "We probably do some work on it, even if it's just a half an hour, every day, year round."

Although they decided to hold their festival the same weekend as the already-established Uptown and Powderhorn festivals, the women are quick to point out that they are not competing against the larger shows, but—on the contrary—trying to work collaboratively to promote the arts. The Uptown Art Festival is a large international and national art show. The Powderhorn Art Festival is community-driven. The Loring Park Arts Festival tries to keep its focus on the artists. Wunderlin said that she feels all of the shows have something different to offer. This year the three festivals worked together for the first time to promote the first weekend in August as an annual art weekend in the Twin Cities.

Wunderlin hopes that the festival becomes something that people integrate into their summer routine. "You do laundry on Tuesday. Mow the lawn Wednesday. Then on the weekend come stroll and fill your eyes and soul with art," she said, adding, "And then hopefully, you buy some too."

If you go:

August 2, 10 a.m.6 p.m.

August 3, 10 a.m.5 p.m.

130 exhibitors