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OCTOBER 5, 2011

Art Is For Your Heart

We slipped away for a little family vacation last weekend to Grand Rapids, Michigan. I've been wanting to go back with the kids ever since I first visited last December on a blogging trip with Experience Grand Rapids. And *serendipitous-ly*, Experience Grand Rapids asked if I'd like to come back as well as write for them for the next few months. So, there's that!

I'd really been hoping to make it up there (about a two-and-a-half hour drive for us) for Artprize - the incredible 19-day public art competition-meets-social experiment open September 21- October 9. A dear friend of mine actually has a piece entered and I wanted to see her as well as all the other amazing entries. The art scene in Grand Rapids was one of the reasons why I first came home and told Jeff we need to move there. It seems to be everywhere you go, and during Artprize it is *literally* everywhere you go. Amazing.



Metal Monkey Mania by Dale Rogers, Blue Bridge



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One of the most important lessons I constantly teach my kids is that you can make art out of anything. I do not want them conditioned to believing that art belongs on just a canvas or paper or even in a gallery or hung on a wall. And at the same time, if canvas or paper is their preferred method... I buy them all the canvas and paper they need. Artprize was the ultimate example of the range of possibilities - and how unique all of our imaginations can be.



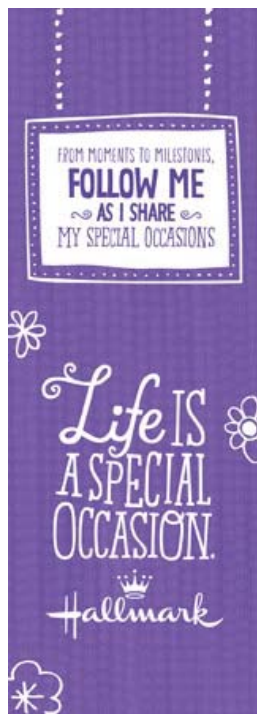
Conversation With Myself by Lori Acott, Grand Rapids Public Museum

We drove up to Grand Rapids on Friday night and got in a little late, but the sidewalks were still busy with people viewing all the outdoor Artprize entries downtown. Near our hotel (the Holiday Inn on Pearl Street) there were plenty of entries to be seen, including the top ten nominee- Rusty (my kids' favorite, and probably mine). We checked in (adjoining rooms, baby!) and walked to a late dinner. It was after 9pm but the streets were filled with people. I held back the tears several times over the course of the weekend at just the thought and sight of so many visitors gathering to see art.



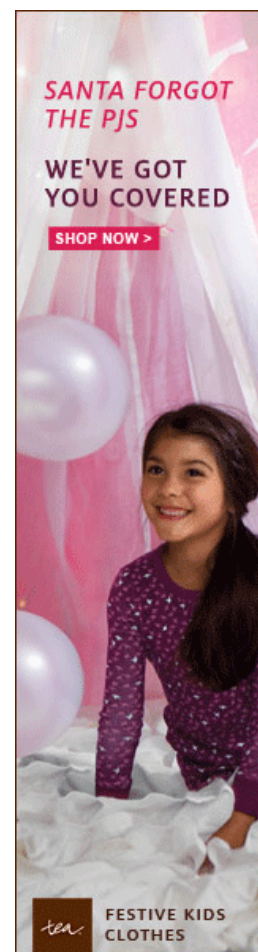
big door.
Portal by Christopher Weed, Grand Rapids Public Museum

Saturday morning we slept in a bit and headed downstairs for a big breakfast at the Pearl Street Grill. Oh, before I forget to mention - there were even Artprize entries in the hotel lobby! As we were heading out to explore Grand Rapids in the daytime, a nice man held the elevator for us and chatted with the kids. He asked if we were here for Artprize and I asked him if he had something entered. Why yes, he did. It was Ritch Branstrom - top ten nominee and creator of Rusty! He was heading over to hang out by his piece and connect with the many fans the big dog with a deep story was attracting.



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Rusty, Ritch Branstrom & the kids.

During Artprize, all Grand Rapids museums and many attractions are free admission. The hotel was next door to the [Grand Rapids Public Museum](#) and we got in line just as the doors were opening for the day. We were able to see [Rain](#) - another top ten nominee, and of course rode the big carousel downstairs.



Yellow by Nathan Sawaya, Grand Rapid Public Museum

We decided to take a drive in hopes to find the church that my friend [Christina Vagenius](#) was showing her phenomenal piece "The Gift," which has also been made into a [book](#). I was in awe watching her drink the admiration as visitors walked the long hall displaying each panel of her work. Being able to hug her there in that moment was one of the best parts of the weekend for me.



Next, we made good on our promise to show the kids REAL LIVE VENUS FLY TRAPS at the

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Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park. Despite all of the art and awesome things we did I am pretty sure this is the first thing they would tell you about. Those carnivorous plants are mind boggling, I tell you.



We ate lunch in the [cafe](#) and were wowed by the menu- rootbeer squash soup, warm goat cheese spread with crackers, hummus plate, Tandoori chicken sandwich, and so on! (There were plenty of more normal eats offered, too, but I was thankful for the healthy and allergy-free options.)



little door.

We took a tram for the big sculpture park tour and Ivy fell asleep. It was really a beautiful day. The ride stopped just outside the [Children's Garden](#) and the kids took off through the little door leading to a wonderland.



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see the Great Lakes?

I do believe we'll be making a trip back up just to spend the day in the Children's garden. We actually stayed until they kicked us out (closing time!) They were nice about it, and even loaded the kids up with stickers and a map of the grounds. Meijer Gardens is free for Artprize right now, too, but you do need a ticket to visit certain areas not involving Artprize.

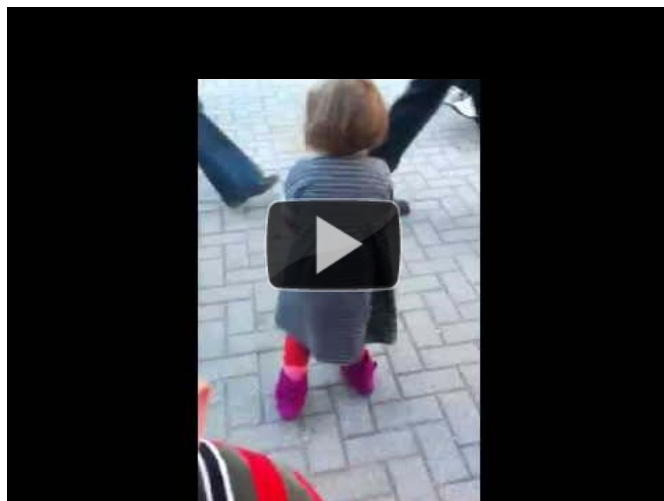


It was about time for us to head home, but we were having such a splendid family day that we just weren't ready to leave. We figured since the **GRAM** (Grand Rapids Art Museum) was free during Artprize and also had extended hours until 10pm, we might as well get in all that art, too. We made the short drive back downtown and into quite a bit of traffic (but compared to Chicago, it's but a minor delay or inconvenience.) We actually found a parking garage close to the GRAM that wasn't full and waited a long time to turn in. Jeff let a car that had been sitting in on-coming traffic turn in front of us and we just hoped we'd still be able to find a spot. When it came time to pay, the attendant told us that car had paid our parking fee to say thanks!



We walked over to the GRAM and followed a short line to get in. This is where we were when I turned over to see [Gray in the arms of another woman](#), being held up to better see [Kathy Goodell's untitled Artprize entry](#) LOL. Oh dear. There were a few different pieces that the artist welcomed us to "move about" or touch, etc. Those were big hits with the kids, of course. Noah loved collecting all of the little artist cards by each entry- I could tell he was really taking it all in.

As we exited the GRAM there was a big concert out front at the [Rosa Parks Circle](#). I didn't catch the name of the performer but Ivy happened to think he was playing just for her. We walked over and let her dance, and just soaked in the crowd and beauty of the moment together. It was really cool.



We were so tempted to try to stay one more night, but it was time to head for home. On the drive we speculated who we thought was going to win the grand prize (winner is announced tomorrow October 6!), hoping it will be Rusty, and each of the kids planned what they would create when they enter Artprize someday. And this makes me so very happy.

Our hotel stay, meals, entry to Meijer Gardens, as well as compensation for this post were paid for as part of my relationship with [Experience Grand Rapids](#). We can't wait to go back. xoxo



By Stephanie Precourt, Adventures In Babywearing - 4:17 PM

tags: [experience grand rapids](#), [family](#), [my life](#), [Noah's artwork](#), [photos](#), [sponsored post](#), [videos](#)

17 comments:

[nicole](#) said...



Wow! I want to go there! This whole post is so engaging and happy.

October 05, 2011 4:45 PM

Mimi's Toes said...



I would love to go check this out. Fun pictures. Love Ivy really getting down to that tune.

October 05, 2011 5:13 PM

keli [at] kidnapped by suburbia said...



suuuuper fun!! i love this happy post :)

October 05, 2011 6:24 PM

Lissa said...



looove Ivy dancing!

October 05, 2011 6:47 PM

Melissa Bothwell-Inglis said...



oh.my.goodness... art-a-palooza!! That's a fantastic scene to submerge your kids in - wow, love it! Especially awesome.. Ivy's dance moves of course. Here's the sound of one mama clapping for the art-education you just gave your family... we artists thank you!

xo

Mel

www.needleandnestdesign.blogspot.com

October 05, 2011 7:54 PM

ABC and 123: A Learning Cooperative said...



I love everything about this post Steph! You captured the experience with your words so well, but what especially stuck out to me - and was at the forefront of my mind as I wrote MyGR6 for the recent initiative - was the generosity of the stranger who paid for your parking in thanks for your kindness. That is the heart of the GR I know and love!

October 05, 2011 8:25 PM

HeatherCurleeNovak said...

Fantastic...so much info. The last time John and I went away pre baby number two we went Peaches B&B in Grand Rapids and checked out Fredrick Meijer Gardens. We were interested in the Dale Chihuly exhibit in particular.

October 05, 2011 9:51 PM

girl willow said...

Looks like so.much.fun!! Family times like that make my heart swell :)

October 06, 2011 2:04 AM

ASchaaf said...



LOVE this post! And I LOVE my hometown! Thanks so much for the very kind words about GR and ArtPrize! Come visit again...we love it here!

October 06, 2011 8:01 AM

Jodi said...

Love this post, and love my city!!

October 06, 2011 8:53 AM

Kaycee said...



I am so glad you guys had such a wonderful time!

When you were at Meijer Gardens you were right around the corner (like 30 seconds) away from where I work! :)

October 06, 2011 8:54 AM

Salchan said...

Steph,

Would you please pass on a compliment to your AMAZINGLY talented artist friend, Christina? I live in Grand Rapids and spent a lot of time looking at an amazing number of Artprize entries yesterday...I have to say that what the public chose as their top ten favorites, were not necessarily all of mine. I was blown away by Christina's work at the United Methodist church on Fulton St, and it TRULY was my favorite piece out of all that I saw! Do you know what time Christina will be signing books on Saturday? I'd love to get an autographed copy!

I hope she enters the contest again, and gets to exhibit in the Grand Rapids Public Museum, or somewhere with more traffic, because I firmly believe SHE would be top 10 material, with better exposure! Keep up the incredible work Christina!

October 06, 2011 4:40 PM

Adventures In Babywearing said...

Salchan, I did indeed pass this on to her! BLESS YOU! I need to find out that time for you, too!

Steph

October 06, 2011 8:45 PM

Adventures In Babywearing said...

Salchan, she said noon until 5! Please say Hi for me! :)

Steph

October 06, 2011 8:58 PM

gianna said...

I couldn't get enough of this post! I'm not a huge art person (probably because my mom would drag me to every art show in the world and I got a little bored with it and since have not gotten past that--not that I don't want to and that it's time to, more I don't know how to). But your whole vacation sounded amazing! And it was just 2 1/2 hours away from you!

How awesome is that!

October 08, 2011 1:49 PM

Nicki MacRae said...

This post has been removed by the author.

October 28, 2011 12:40 AM

Nicki MacRae said...

Just stumbled across your blog for the first time and this lovely post - smiled as I read :-)

I'm an artist myself (and ex-babywearer), and your hopes for your kids creative and artistic futures mirror my own for my three children... Loving Rusty too! <3

Nicki MacRae, nicki@nicki-paints.co.uk

Nicki MacRae, nicki@nicki-paints.co.uk

October 28, 2011 12:41 AM

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