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Clinton Snider and Scott Hocking created a wall installation with found objects, "Relics." (Clinton Snider)



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ArtPrize draws world attention to west Michigan city

Michael H. Hodges / Detroit News Arts Writer

To hear organizers tell it, everything at last year's inaugural ArtPrize in Grand Rapids was much larger than expected.

Founder Rick DeVos says he thought the audacious, citywide art competition with nearly \$500,000 in cash awards would draw an audience largely made up of twenty- and thirtysomethings, not families. As a result, they didn't stock any ArtPrize T-shirts in kids' sizes.

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"It just wasn't on the radar that this would be a family thing," DeVos says, whose expectations were upended when 200,000 visitors, including families and school buses full of students, poured into Grand Rapids. "We're not making that mistake this year. This year we've got kids' stuff -- and dog stuff."

Nineteen days of art

This year, ArtPrize, an art contest and citywide exhibit with a \$250,000 grand prize, returns Wednesday for its second year with more artists, more venues and a plan to make getting around easier for out-of-town visitors.

For 19 days, the 3-square-mile core of downtown Grand Rapids will morph into a vast indoor/outdoor art museum where patrons can wander about, gawk at art and then vote online to pick the contest's top 10 winners. This year, organizers have added a contest-within-a-contest that also allows national experts to weigh in.

To be clear, ArtPrize has never been about picking the "best" art, says DeVos, a twentysomething entrepreneur whose grandfather Richard DeVos founded Amway, and whose father, Dick DeVos, was Michigan's 2006 Republican gubernatorial candidate.

"I wanted to do something to celebrate art and Grand Rapids," Rick DeVos says, "and get this giant conversation going."

Last year's event was "a home run all the way around," says Doug Small, president of Experience Grand Rapids, the city's convention bureau. "We're never going to host a Super Bowl or Olympics," he says. "This is our equivalent."

Showstopper on the bridge

Sure to jump-start the art conversation that DeVos hopes for is artist Jackson Martin's "The Redemptive Quality of Life II," displayed on a bridge over the Grand River.

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Web site: ArtPrize.org
Photos: 2009 ArtPrize finalists

More information

ArtPrize

Wednesday-Oct. 10
Downtown Grand Rapids
www.artprize.org

Getting around: For \$5, you can get an ArtPrize map and wristband that gives you free transit on the ArtPrize shuttle as well as the city bus system.

Voting

How to register to vote

ArtPrize relies on visitors to pick the top 10 finalists, and then vote again to rank the winners. To participate, you must:

- Be 16 years or older.
- Have a valid government-issued ID and a working e-mail address.

Register to vote at any one of the seven ArtPrize exhibition centers or at the Old Federal Building. Save time by registering at www.artprize.org, though you'll still have to activate your registration in person.

Once you've registered

Vote online at www.artprize.org for as many works as you want from Wednesday until Sept. 29. See details under the Voting tab.

Top 10 finalists are announced Sept. 30.

Thereafter, cast one vote for your favorite artist (you can change that vote as often as you like until Oct. 6).

First through 10th prize winners will be announced Oct. 7.

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