

Memorable Musings

Dayton Sideshow Nine aims to inspire

By Chelsea Davis

“I hope that it continues to grow and transform, not only itself but other people, as well,” Clarke said. “Participants and people that just come to check it out – I want them to be inspired and transformed.”

“I really believe in it,” Jennifer Clarke, co-director of Dayton Sideshow Nine, said when discussing this year’s event. “It’s a great opportunity to connect with the community and strengthen the fabric [of the community].”

What was conceived in 2006, by Laurana Wong, as a grassroots arts show, has become a staple in the Dayton community. The annual event showcases the visual and musical talents of local Daytonites, and gives attendees the opportunity to explore all Dayton has to offer thanks to Sideshow’s partnership with Dayton’s “Urban Nights.” This year’s event is May 9 and 10 at the Yellow Cab.

Dayton Sideshow is a feature of the Dayton Circus Creative Collective, a seven year old organization that was created around Sideshow, to ensure the event’s continued success.

“The DCCC sprang up around [Sideshow] to make sure it kept going,” Clarke said. “So that’s like a supporting entity.”

Going into its ninth year, Sideshow hasn’t lost sight of Wong’s true intention. While it has grown over the years, Sideshow still pulls in both artists that aren’t established yet and artists who didn’t go the academic route.

“It’s art at a really accessible level,” Clarke said. “No one is requiring you to have an MFA.”

Another important aspect of Dayton Sideshow is the location of the event. Wong initially sought out underused and oft-forgot about buildings in the city. She wanted to bring some light and recognition to these places. The first few Sideshows were held in the Eastern-most storefront of the Cannery and at the Armory, and have been held at the Yellow Cab for the past couple of years.

The biggest draw for artists is the ability to express themselves freely and then share those pieces with the community. It doesn’t matter what they create – paintings, quilts, sculptures, music – it is not only accepted but celebrated.

“We wanted to have a place in Dayton open to any artists, whether you’re crafting or quilt-making ...,” David Kenworthy, a local artist and Sideshow volunteer, said. “... Artists need space to express themselves and to have that space for one or two days is great.”

Sideshow didn’t start out with a theme, but has used a different theme for the event for the past three years. It started with Lucky Seven (Sideshow Seven) and this year’s theme is the nine muses of Greek mythology.

The artists are encouraged but not forced to incorporate the theme into their work. It's merely there to inspire the artists and for branding purposes.

"I asked all of the contributors to explain what intrigues and inspires them," Clarke said. "I'm a music photographer and musicians inspire me."

Clarke first got involved with Sideshow Six as a volunteer and quickly fell in love with the ideas surrounding the event. She took on more tasks each year, and is co-running it this year with Todd the Fox, a local musician and frequent Sideshow contributor.

Clarke explained it was actually Sideshow that influenced her path. She was a fine arts photographer but after seeing Todd the Fox perform during her first year with Sideshow, she realized she had a passion for music photography.

"I wasn't a music photographer until the very first day of Sideshow," Clarke said. "When I met him and saw him perform it inspired me to take photos of musicians, and now that's what I'm best known for. That was the thing that really transformed me and influenced me as an artist."

She hopes people have the same connection to this year's event. She hopes people are excited and intrigued by the art they encounter, which shouldn't be too difficult this year. Over the past nine years Sideshow has steadily grown, and this year they expanded to three stages and 40 musicians, not to mention the incredibly diverse range of visual artists.

For Sideshow Nine some of the artists are even working together. An artist called Etch teamed up with Ben Riddleburger to create a large, three-dimensional, interactive piece resembling the childhood board game, Mouse Trap.

"It's nice to see they are trying new things and using the space in different ways," Clarke said. "Some of the artists are working together and some exhibits will bleed into each other."

From starting as an experimental art show, Dayton Sideshow has evolved tremendously over the years, allowing for more artists to join in and for even better ideas. Sideshow has even begun to reach out to the up-and-coming artists in the surrounding universities.

This year the-powers-that-be have added more food and drink to complement the entertainment. Clarke and her volunteers wanted Sideshow to be a one-stop-shop, where people could mingle, eat, drink and be entertained, and not have to leave for food and possibly miss some extraordinary exhibits.

Clarke is extremely excited for this year's event and for the future of Dayton Sideshow and the Dayton Circus Creative Collective.

"I hope that it continues to grow and transform, not only itself but other people, as well," Clarke said. "Participants and people that just come to check it out – I want them to be inspired and transformed."

Dayton Sideshow Nine is May 9 & 10 from 5 p.m. to 1 a.m. at the Yellow Cab building, 700 East Fourth Street. The event is run in conjunction with Dayton's Urban Nights, and is a free event, with food and drink provided. For more information on Dayton Sideshow Nine check out their website: <http://sideshow.daytoncircus.org/index.html>