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City art party

By Jennifer Huberdeau, North Adams Transcript
Article Launched: 06/10/2008 10:17:35 AM EDT

Tuesday, June 10

NORTH ADAMS -- As gas prices skyrocket and vacations are being planned closer to home, the city and several local organizations are hoping to create the "critical mass" needed to draw tourists into the downtown with the launch of a new arts initiative that includes the opening of four new galleries.

"These new spaces are about creating critical mass," Jonathon Secor, director of special projects at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts said Monday at the kick-off of DownStreet Art. "It's a celebration of art in North Adams. It's about the economy. It's about getting people into the downtown and into the stores shopping."

DownStreet Art is a collaboration of the city, MCLA, the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition and Scarafoni Realty, which is donating empty storefronts on Main and Holden streets. The four galleries will include works from Jarvis Rockwell, the North Adams Artists' Cooperative, the artist's preparing the Sol LeWitt galleries at Mass MoCA and the installation Lumens: Reconnecting the Adams(es).

"When Jonathon Secor came to me and broached the subject of a project like this, I was all over it like a



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cheap suit," Mayor John Barrett III said. "When I go to places to talk about integrating arts into the community, this is what I talk about. I've been to

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Virginia four times in the last six months to talk about art as an economic catalyst. It just doesn't happen by itself -- it's certainly a cooperative effort."

In addition to the four galleries, the initiative is also launching an art gallery map that includes the location of 18 galleries and museums in the downtown.

"The art map includes not only the new galleries,

MCLA Gallery 51 and Mass MoCA, but a collection of galleries and other spaces that have been in existence for a while -- some of them have been hidden from the public," Secor said. "These maps will be given out at Mass MoCA, the Holiday Inn, the Porches inn, Jae's Inn, Taylor's Within the next few weeks anyone coming to the area for visual arts and anyone who's come to the area not knowing they're here for the visual arts will have this map to guide them."

He said the majority of the new galleries would launch their shows on June 26 and run through Oct. 31.

Diane Sullivan, of the North Adams Artists' Cooperative Gallery at 107 Main St., said about 30 artists from the city, Adams, Williamstown, Pittsfield and Hudson Valley will exhibit their works over the course of the summer and fall.

"We will feature two to three artists every three weeks," she said. "A lot of artists are taking a financial risk and investing sweat equity into making this gallery a beautiful and welcoming space. Artists usually work alone, so it's nice for us to come together and find out what others are creating. We plan to have a few artist talks in the space as well."

Artist Jarvis Rockwell, son of illustrator Norman Rockwell and North Adams resident, will create, Maya III, an 11-foot long and 9-foot tall step-pyramid lined with thousands of action figures and furniture in various positions.

"It's really different each time it is set up," Rockwell said of the piece, which was originally shown at Mass MoCA in 2002. A second pyramid, Maya II, exists in Scottsdale, Ariz.

The pyramids were inspired by a trip to Madras/Chennai in India, where iconic statues lined the tops of shrines, Sean Riley, manager of Gallery 51, explained during the launch.

"Essentially, people play with toys, which are just symbols," Rockwell said. "An action figure of Stallone is not Stallone himself. It's just an interpretation of him - just like Batman. They keep making versions of the character, but change him each time.

"Action figures are very much like the figures in churches -- they are interpreted by the time and place they are in. They change with time. The nice thing about action figures are that they're something you can believe in without having to wholly invest yourself."

Primary Secondary Volumes 1 & 2, a gallery featuring the work of the artists creating the Sol LeWitt retrospective at MoCA, will open at 28 Holden St. and will host two separate shows of work.

"In March the area was flooded with 24 new artists, who during the day are working of creating the retrospective," Denise Markonish, curator at MoCA, said. "When we realized we would have the opportunity to use this space, I thought it was a perfect opportunity for these apprentices and interns to show off their own work. They are often cast in the shadow of Sol's work."

Each of the two shows will feature 10 artists. The first show will run June 26 through July 30, with the second show kicking off July 31 and ending in October.

The fourth gallery at 61 Main St. will feature Lumens, a joint exhibit between MCLA Gallery 51, Greylock Arts in Adams and Turbulance.org. The exhibit, which interlocks the Main

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Street gallery with the Greylock Arts gallery at 93 Summer St., Adams, and an online gallery, will utilize lamps and proximity meters to connect people moving in the two galleries with one another.

Lumens will open July 10 in both Adams and North Adams, but will offer demonstrations at the Main Street gallery on June 26. Gallery 51 will also open a new show on June 26.

Jessica Conzo, program coordinator of the Berkshire Cultural Resource Center and co-chairwoman of the North Adams Open Studios committee, said the galleries, which use space utilized by the October event, shouldn't have a huge impact on the group show.

"We've been securing other spaces in the downtown, at Heritage State Park, and available spaces in the mills," she said. "I think this will be a nice compliment to Open Studios. We've done really well with registrants so far, and we haven't heard of anyone not signing up because these spaces won't be available."

Secor said the four galleries would be integrated into the weekend arts festival.

For more information about DownStreet Art or to view a printable arts map, visit www.downstreetart.org.

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