

Medill Reports Chicago



CHICAGO ARTISTS LET THEIR FREAK FLAGS FLY AT HALLOWEEN ARTS IN THE DARK PARADE

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Chicago celebrated the wicked, the wild and the weird Saturday, as artists from across the country strutted their stuff before crowds of excited fans lined up along Columbus Drive. Residents of all ages watched fire-spinning skeletons, a bulbous blue anglerfish and even a train of hearses, owned by local enthusiasts.

New local arts non-profit LUMA8, conceived Arts in the Dark to unite Chicago artists.

“It’s all about declaring Halloween as the artists’ holiday and creating a moment for all of Chicago’s cultural communities to come together and plant their flag on one night,” said Sharene Shariatzadeh, president and CEO of LUMA8.

Mark Kelly, the city’s commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, served as ringmaster, complete with a top hat. For Kelly, the event was a welcome change from a typical Chicago parade.

“I love parades, but I hate Chicago parades because they’re formulaic,” said Kelly. “This is meant to hearken to Mardi Gras and Brazilian Carnival, to the power of mass and spectacle, dance and performance, all coming together.”

Kelly said he hopes the parade will become an iconic Chicago event that will draw participants of all artistic shades and stripes.

Organizations including the Art Institute of Chicago and its school, West Town Bikes, Aztec Dance Chicago and the Hardcore Hearse Club made their way from Balbo Drive to East Monroe Street, waving, beeping and grinning all the way.

Chicagoan and performance artist Gwen Klemenz came to the parade clad in her spookiest skeleton costume ready to show off her skills with fire poi, swinging flaming tethered weights in rhythmic patterns, much to the crowd’s delight.

“It’s really cool when we get to take what we love and do for each other and share it with the city and community at large,” said Klemenz.

Klemenz came with Full Moon Fire Jam, an organization centered on monthly events that coincide with the full moon. The gatherings are intended to attract professional performance artists, as well as hobbyists, for an evening of fun and creative freedom.

She said city officials are very supportive of artists like her, and the parade seems like a natural extension of that relationship.

“Chicago really lets its freak flag fly on this parade!” said Klemenz. “How often do you get to hear a commissioner say, ‘Ok everybody, line up behind the hearses?’”



Photo at top: Fire spinner and performance artist Gwen Klemenz lights up the night with her friends from the Full Moon Fire Jam. (Naomi Waxman/MEDILL)

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