

Alberta Avenue showcases local artists

Three-day Kaleido! festival brings beauty, promotes rejuvenation for 'tough' area

Alexandra Zabjek, The Edmonton Journal

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Christy Morin is inviting Edmonton to sit on her porch this weekend.

Well, not exactly her porch, but certainly to visit her Alberta Avenue community, where the three-day Kaleido! Family Arts Festival starts Friday.

"It's a celebration bringing Edmonton to where authentic artists live and work," Morin said. "We're saying, 'Come on in, Edmonton. See where we live, sit on our porch.' "

Morin is a founder of Arts on the Ave, an organization of local artists that has been promoting the arts community around 118th Avenue for almost three years.

The Kaleido festival is the organization's biggest annual event, with almost 250 visual artists, musicians and filmmakers participating. The vast majority of the artists live in the area.

In the sometimes rough and derelict Alberta Avenue neighbourhood, such a festival can push people to re-examine their views of the community, Morin said.

"It shows who we truly are," she said. "This is community. This is what people can do when they get together and work."

If people see a tough neighbourhood when

they walk down 118th Avenue, artist Jennifer Berkenbosch sees the character of a Prairie city whose weathered buildings are a sign of a unique history and location.

Berkenbosch has affixed a series of paintings to 11 buildings on 118th Avenue for her "Radiant" project, which is part of the festival. The paintings of bright and intricate radial patterns are contrasted against the chipped paint and crude plywood on some boarded-up buildings.

"I wanted to make these beautiful, soft things for these tough places," Berkenbosch said. "They're intended to be these little surprises for pedestrians."

Berkenbosch is glad the 118th Avenue area is getting more attention in recent years. But she hopes the neighbourhood's character is not lost along the way. Art can ensure that doesn't happen, she said.

"Art is fundamental to good quality rejuvenation," she said. "In the core of the city, there should be an artful approach to the way we make it renewed."

But renewal can be a tricky process -- Berkenbosch has had four of her paintings stolen since she started putting them up two months ago.

Other artists will also use unorthodox venues

to display their work at the festival. Unused buildings and even an old bakery are all venues for the Kaleido! festival. Almost all of the events are free, and children's events are also planned.

A festival information area will be set up at 9210 118th Ave.; events will take place in venues across several blocks in the area.

For Morin, the festival will be "a win" if she sees people coming together to enjoy art. In the longer term, the festival is another step towards creating a stronger community.

"It's the bringing together of community and that's what changes a neighbourhood," she said.

This is the third year for the arts festival, although it was previously called Arts Alive!

Attendance shot up from 300 people to almost 5,000 in the first two years, Morin said.

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Edmonton artist Jennifer Berkenbosch poses with one of her works along 118th Avenue.
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