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## **The Art Around Us: Convergence 2001**

By Jill Puleo

OK, it's confession time. I am going to ask you a series of questions and I would like you to answer them honestly. Ready? How many times have you sat at the intersection at Steeple and Memorial and wondered if the large sculpture that looks like rusty machinery over there in the square was, in fact, some sort of disproportionate homage to the modern muffler? Do you know that *Carmen* was not originally scored as "Hip-hop opera"? Do you go to WaterFire mainly for the doughboys?

Let's face it people, just because you know how to order a ten dollar martini, that doesn't make you cultured. Lucky for you, we live in one of the most dynamic cities in the nation. One in which, during September 7-23, you might be able to improve the sorry state of your cultural landscape. Or at least trim a bush or two.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I offer you a solution: *The Convergence International Arts Festival 2001*.

*Convergence* has been living and breathing right here in the Renaissance City since way back in 1988. Each September, both local and international artists are invited to present their works to the public in the form of music, drama, film, sculpture and other forms. Originally the word "Convergence" was chosen to convey the idea that all types of art would be represented in one large event. However, the name has also come to represent the way that the festival has allowed culture to mix with everyday life by ripping the arts out of their traditional venues and sticking them smack dab in the middle of our city. Hence the large muffler-thing in Market Square, which, by the way, is *Churn* by Andrew Dunhill.

"The fact that these huge works of art are in very public places is not an accident," notes Bob Rizzo, Director of the Office of Cultural Affairs of the Providence Parks Department. "The people I'm interested in reaching don't go to museums anyway," says Rizzo. Kind of sounds like he's looking for you doesn't it? Well, he is, and he's not afraid to do crazy things like not charge you for the majority of the events just so you'll put down the DVD remote and come downtown.

For example, head down to the River Walk at College Street on September 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> to participate in the **Sculpture Tours** leaving hourly from *Textured Gear* by Rob Lorenson. You might finally learn a thing or two about the pieces you've been staring at for the last few months and maybe even be able to refer to them by their real names instead of "Big Silver Donut with Teeth" and "Large Concrete Swoopy Thing."

It all has to do with their sneaky little way of taking the fear factor out of modern art by forcing you to live with it for a while. "There is a definite fear factor," says Rizzo. "People are afraid that they won't understand it, but if you actually talk with them about a

particular piece, they really do know what's going on." Not only is he inviting us to a citywide party for free, but he's telling us that we are smarter than we think we are...I think I like this guy.

If that weren't enough, the crew at the Office of Cultural Affairs has assured that *Convergence* truly offers something for everyone...even for those of us who wouldn't know sculpture from a heap of mashed potatoes. Ever feel like you are going in circles and never really getting anywhere? You may actually feel right at home at the Mathewson St. Church on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>. A large, 32' **Labyrinth** is there for the walking and said to be representative of the journey to see the heart of God. Seeking thought-provoking emotion and a healthy dose of history? Check out *Unfinished Symphony*, part of the **Convergence Film/Video/Animation Festival** taking place September 14<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>. This Sundance Film Festival entry by Providence native Mike Majoros will make its debut here on September 16<sup>th</sup> at the Cable Car Cinema. Set to the sweeping and powerful music of Henry Gorecki's 3<sup>rd</sup> Symphony, the film chronicles a rally against the Vietnam War called "Operation POW" that took place in Boston on Memorial Weekend, 1971.

OK, so you don't want to walk and you don't want to emote. How about parking your butt and listening to something totally new and exciting? On September 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> at 7pm, **musicians from Mali, Morocco, and Manhattan** will rock the house at the RISD Auditorium on South Main Street. Listen as New York Jazz meets World Music groove with the stylings of Ben Allison, hotter than hot saxophonist Michael Blake, and African stars Mamadou Diabate and Nass Marrakech. This show is a once in a lifetime event brought together especially for *Convergence* and a perfect opportunity to get the latest N'SYNC tune out of your head for good.

Of course you knew that it wouldn't be a festival in Providence without a little bit of Italian tradition thrown in somewhere and *Convergence* is no exception. The **Convergence Street Painting Festival** is one of the signature events and definitely worth checking out. Hundreds of artists will be on South Main Street at College Hill transforming squares of the actual street into gorgeous works of art, using nothing but chalk and more talent than you or I will ever have. The street painting takes place on Saturday, September 15<sup>th</sup> from noon to 10pm and Sunday, September 16<sup>th</sup> from 11am to 5pm. There is also a special preview on Friday, September 14<sup>th</sup> from noon to 5pm. The squares can be sponsored by a business or anyone else who has a little over a hundred bucks to spare and they can even provide you with an artist, so you don't look like a fool wasting four square feet of pavement with "Lisa + Bobby 4 EVA".

Should you decide to wander outside of the city limits (shudder to think), you will find that almost the whole state has gotten into the *Convergence* scene, taking advantage of the compact, yet richly diverse nature of Rhode Island. A five-minute drive to Pawtucket will feel like a 5,000-mile trek to China on September 9<sup>th</sup> when 38 traditionally painted **Dragon Boats** set sail in the Pawtucket River. This exotic and colorful event will include nine races starting from the School Street Pier from 8am to 5:30pm. Or, spend an afternoon at Easton's Beach in Newport between September 9<sup>th</sup> and November 18<sup>th</sup> to

experience **Wind Sea Sky 2001**, an interactive display of large-scale works of art. There are also over 20 theatres and galleries all over the Ocean State that will be displaying special works during *Convergence*, including a **Backstage Tour** at both PPAC and Trinity.

The efforts of the Office of Cultural Affairs are certainly not going unnoticed. Despite the nods of recognition from both the *ProJo* and the *Wall Street Journal*, perhaps the most sparkling endorsement comes from observing the way in which the people of Rhode Island have come to live with the works of the *Convergence Festival*. On a sunny July day, it is not usual to see the local day care troupe crawling all over *Textured Gear* on the River Walk, a car slowing down while necks crane to catch the top of *Oogon* at Memorial Boulevard and Steeple Street, or a couple arguing about which way *Flock of Birds II* is spinning in Waterplace Park. It is even rumored that some of the RIPTA trolley drivers have taken to describing the works to their passengers in humorous, albeit erroneous shtick while cruising through the city. "I hear a lot more conversation about the works than I ever imagined," says Rizzo with a hopeful grin.