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## Arts Walk brings aesthetic to street goers



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Unlike a traditional studio tour, this weekend's Durham Art Walk is a self-guided walking excursion, featuring works by more than 200 artists in unique locations scattered across downtown Durham. Pieces range from jewelry to paintings to sculptures, and sites include cafes, hair salons, an ad agency and a used CD store.

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Since its modest beginnings in 1999, the Durham Art Walk has exploded in popularity, said Barclay McConnell, artist services manager for the Durham Arts Council. Because the artists do not face any prerequisites to showcase their work, the participants vary in experience.

"Anyone can be a part of it," McConnell said. "Although the majority are professionals, you'll come across artists who aren't that great or who are brand new."

McConnell attributes the increase in artists to “small improvements,” such as the addition of a promotion commercial and a redesign of the walking map. She expects more than 4,000 people to take part in the two-day event. The showcase will also include live musical performances and food from local vendors.

Although shuttles will be provided, all sites are within walking distance of one another. While some are actual studio spaces, such as Golden Belt, others utilize nontraditional venues. The Durham Performing Arts Center, for example, will feature work by 25 artists and the American Tobacco Campus will host seven photographers’ pieces.

“The Durham art scene is growing, and so a showcase of our local artists is bound to become more popular,” McConnell said. “I think [the art scene] is grabbing people’s attention more and more. Plus, we add surprises to make it intriguing.”

One such incentive is the second annual scavenger hunt, presented by a collection of artists known as Durty Durham. This year, the artists “beefed up” the scavenger hunt with extra attention to details, McConnell said.

People will unscramble a six-letter puzzle by deciphering clues about the sites. The hunt is meant “for the children and the young at heart,” said Patrick Phelps McKeown, DAC artist services coordinator.

“We want to raise awareness about the history of Durham by drawing attention to famous landmarks,” he added.

Although all pieces are available for purchase, McConnell said the event serves a larger purpose for the community.

“The [walk] has a multifaceted mission to help promote local artists and also rebuild this area,” she said. “It’s about revitalizing downtown Durham.”

*The Durham Art Walk is Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m. in the downtown Durham area.*