

Neighbor & Classifieds

NCL

Creative thinking

Suburban artists, festival producers adapt to virtual art fairs this summer

By **SCOTT C. MORGAN**
smorgan@dailyherald.com

Amy Amdur, president and CEO of Amdur Productions, thought she had seen it all. In 37 years of producing outdoor art fairs in Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin, Amdur has dealt with extreme heat, unseasonable cold, high winds, hail and downpours that resulted in flooding.

"The current situation with the pandemic is something I never ever anticipated," Amdur said.

Amdur is not alone. Art fair producers and artists who make a living selling their work on the festival circuit have all had to make tough choices and adapt because of COVID-19.

"If I had been told that my job was going to end, I would have laughed at you," said Jill Tortorella, an Antioch-based ceramics artist who normally sells her work at around 35 art fairs a year and just started a site on Etsy.com. "I also teach classes on a private basis in my studio, which has also ground to a halt because of social distancing."

The coronavirus has forced some fairs to be rescheduled, like the Amdur-produced Barrington Art Festival, which moved from Memorial Day weekend to Sept. 12 and 13. Others were canceled outright. These include Schaumburg's Prairie Arts Festival, which normally takes place over Memorial Day weekend; the Geneva Chamber of Commerce's juried Geneva Arts Fair in July; and Libertyville's Festival of the Arts in August.

"We had 140-plus artists who were accepted, and what we did was give them a 100 percent refund of their money," said Erin Melloy, a consultant with the Geneva Chamber.

In place of a refund, other juried art fairs are also giving artists the option to defer their spots to 2021. That's what Tortorella chose to do for the spring edition of the Fiesta Arts Fair in San Antonio, Texas.

"It's very competitive," Tortorella said. "I would rather not go back to the jury pile. I'll let them keep that money and use it next year."

Inevitably, many 2020 art fairs have gone online. For example, Chicago's 57th Street Art Fair set for June

6 and 7 has now become a virtual one with links to individual artists' websites.

In other cases, the art fairs create their own websites to showcase the artists' work. One such event earlier this month was the Grayslake Art Alliance's May Fest.

"It came off really well. It exceeded my expectations in terms of sales," said Grayslake Arts Alliance President Ernest Schweit. "We had more dollars and cents in sales than any show we've ever done."

Amdur considers herself to be really fortunate that she didn't have to build a website from the ground up for art shows going online. Amdur Productions launched the art sales site ArtZipper.com in 2018, and that's the platform they're using to host the refashioned Northbrook Virtual Art Fest (June 6-13), the Virtual Promenade of Art Arlington Heights (June 20-26) and the Virtual Gold Coast Art Fair (June 27-July 3).

"We see the artist just like you're at a show, we see some of her art — 10 to 100 images," said Amdur, adding that some artists also will have online hours from noon to 4 p.m. Saturdays so patrons can video chat via Zoom for seminars and demonstrations.

"We're trying to not just make it a shopping site, but an interactive site," Amdur said. She even joked that it might be possible for a customer to show his or her home and ask an artist for suggestions of what piece would be the best fit.

Amdur is also making producing plans if state restrictions ease up for outdoor public gatherings. Currently, Amdur is making the call for art fairs to be canceled, rescheduled or go virtual 45 days ahead of the planned opening.

"Our festivals will look a little different," Amdur said. "The aisles are going to be wider, the booths are going to be spaced out rather than wall-to-wall. We're going to have the direction flow for people to walk like you already see in some stores. Artists may be wearing masks with hand sanitizer in every booth."

Amdur hopes that the public will support artists, because they're all operating as small businesses in this trying time.

"There are artists that I've known

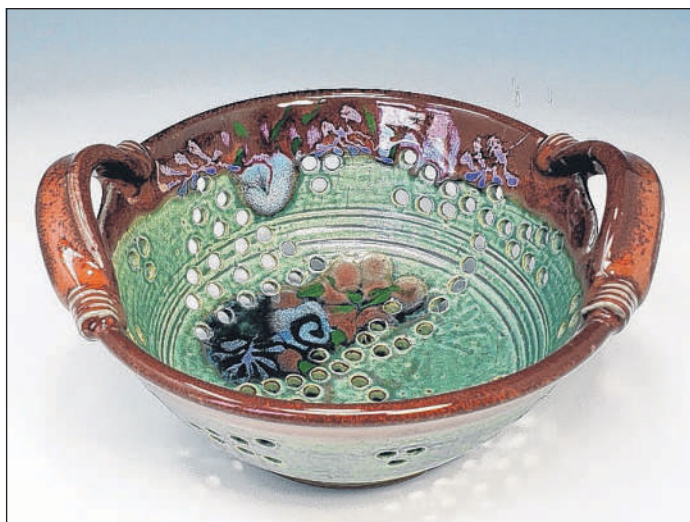


COURTESY OF JILL TORTORELLA
Antioch-based artist Jill Tortorella has an Etsy site featuring handmade coffee mugs.

During quarantine, Antioch-based artist and potter Jill Tortorella learned how to do digital photographs of her work for her own Etsy page to sell her work online.



COURTESY OF JILL TORTORELLA



COURTESY OF JILL TORTORELLA
Antioch-based artist and potter Jill Tortorella has an Etsy site featuring a "Berry Colander — Lush Green with Copper Red Rim."

ARLINGTON HEIGHTS VIRTUAL ART FEST

Powered by ArtZipper.com

LIVE: JUNE 20 12-4PM CENTRAL STANDARD TIME

JUNE 20- JUNE 26 • SHOP ALL WEEK

AMDUR PRODUCTIONS
LILIANA DINOS

Search Artists

VIEW THE WELCOME VIDEO!

Aaron Reed, Art for the Wall



JOIN VIDEO CHAT

SEE MORE SHOP NOW

"My style was created to leave something to the imagination by using colored pencils and acrylic to capture the moment of life."

Carla Bank, Art for the Wall



JOIN VIDEO CHAT

SEE MORE SHOP NOW

Steve Wewerka, Art for the Wall



JOIN VIDEO CHAT

SEE MORE SHOP NOW

"These Museum Archival Images are the finest quality prints available. Each signed and numbered print is hand crafted by me and made..."

Dana Reed, Jewelry



JOIN VIDEO CHAT

SEE MORE SHOP NOW

"Dana's handmade artisan jewelry is both feminine and unique, an

COURTESY OF AMDUR PRODUCTIONS

Amdur Productions adapted the Promenade of Art Arlington Heights into a virtual fair online in June.

"There are artists that I've known for 10 to 30 years, and they need to make their mortgage payments. They need to sell art to put food on their table. The more support that we can give them, the better."

Amy Amdur

for 10 to 30 years, and they need to make their mortgage payments," Amdur said. "They need to sell art to put food on their table. The more support that we can give them, the better."

ART ZIPPER.COM

COBALT UTILITY/CLUB/WHY A FESTIVAL SHOPPING CART LOGGED IN AS CAPTAIN PRICELESS 847.926.4300

DANA REED

Dana Reed Designs Gallery

See: Overview/Video Booth Store Awards

"Dana's handmade artisan jewelry is both feminine and unique, an effortless marriage of sophisticated craftsmanship with a hint of urban edge."

Dana Reed is a local Chicago artisan who began making jewelry while earning her degree in Graphic Design. Her hobby quickly grew into a business in 2002. After many years her handmade artisan collection evolved from beaded to metal-infused jewelry. Mixing metals and textures can be found throughout her handmade artisan collections. Dana's handmade artisan jewelry is an effortless marriage of.

Read Store About Dana

Bead Beaded Ridge Oval (18K) 18K Gold

Bead Beaded Ridge Oval (18K) 18K Gold

Bead Beaded Ridge Oval (18K) 18K Gold

COURTESY OF AMDUR PRODUCTIONS

Art lovers who would normally go to the Promenade of Art Arlington Heights can now visit artists' online pages on ArtZipper.com, like this one for artist Dana Reed. The virtual art fair will take place June 20-26 online.



COURTESY OF WINGER MARKETING, 2011

The Port Clinton Art Festival in Highland Park is tentatively scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 29-30. Amdur Productions will evaluate 45 days before the event whether to cancel, switch to an online fair, or to go ahead with new social distancing layouts and regulations.