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Art and fun for a Select few hundred

By **Bethany D Prange**
ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH
11/30/2006



Ama Aningo, left, and his wife, Shauna, of Dellwood and Phuong Nguyen and Julie Smith of University City enjoy Select Night, a free event at the Contemporary Art Museum in St. Louis. (Becca Young)

Five hundred to 700 people attend Select Nights, events that by their nature attract an eclectic crowd to the art scene. Guests eat, drink, dance and mingle in a relaxed social setting — with the added bonus of a cultural experience.

With a few Bud Selects and a little dance music, Select Nights at the Contemporary have become a culture-conscious alternative to happy hour.

"We want people to feel like this is their museum, a place where they can go and hang out on a Thursday night," says Lisa Grove, deputy director of the Contemporary. "We wanted to demystify the museum, show them art can be fun, art can be social."

Checking out the exhibits at a local art museum has always been a worthy pastime. But for more than a year, the Contemporary also has made it equally accessible and comfortable.

Select Night at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

What: Select Nights are hosted by ArtLink, a group of area arts organization that promotes cultural and social events for young St. Louisans.

Where: 3750 Washington Boulevard

When: 6-9 p.m. Dec. 7 and the first Thursday of each month.

How much: Admission and appetizers are free. A \$2 donation to the museum is appreciated for drink tickets. Guests must be 21 or older to enter.

More info: 314-535-0770 or www.contemporarystl.org or www.artlinkstl.org

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On Dec. 7, you can sample free appetizers from Wolfgang Puck's, sip a beer, listen to dance music from DJ Randall Roberts and check out live video feeds from VJ Zlatko Cosic.

Organizers have worked hard to shatter the stuffy image people sometimes associate with art museums. The exhibits are ever-changing and always edgy enough to keep even the least-interested art buff intrigued.

The museum leans toward contemporary works that "really appeal to people with open minds — to people looking for something fun and different," Grove says.

People who don't even know that they like art will love the work of "Larry Krone: Artist/Entertainer," Grove says. It's a 10-year survey by New York-based artist Krone that includes his collection of everyday objects, such as tin foil, quilts, handkerchiefs, toys and clothing, plus creations from bodily castoffs such as hair, teeth and nail clippings.

The other exhibit is "Melantropics," the work of a young German and Brazilian artist, Janaina Tschape. Tschape directed female models costumed as fantastic fictional creatures and photographed them in lush gardens. The result is a photo series in which the colorful costumes and props transform the individuals into hybrids of plants and beings.

Both exhibits will be available for viewing at the Dec. 7 event, so plan to stay long enough to view them, snack on the goodies and meet some new people, too.