

Artomatic 2017

Like the arts organizations based in downtown buildings slated for redevelopment during the 1970s and '80s, Artomatic inhabits structures that will be remade for more conventional mercantile purposes. The difference is that Artomatic moves in, not for years, but for just a few weeks. That can bring spontaneity and serendipity to unlikely spots, such as the empty Crystal City office block that has briefly ceded seven floors to art. Still, after 18 years of the uncurated, unjuried fairs, certain elements are predictable.

Many of the 600 contributors offer imagery derived from, or suitable for, the commercial-art multiverse of fantasy, cheesecake, sci-fi, cute animals and travel photography. A lot of this stuff is very well done but doesn't really need the exposure. Some of it, in fact, can be found on websites such as Etsy.

As usual, Artomatic's temporary home is mostly divided into small former offices. That makes it harder to survey, but the contained spaces do lend themselves to immersive installations. Among the darkened-room highlights are pulsing light pieces by Evie Altman and Barry Schmetter (whose work also emits music) and Bardia Saeedi. Also striking is Justine Light's large tree stump, dead and yet alive, because it's embellished with shells and pine cones embedded in moss.

Some of the most engaging pieces are 3-D. Trish Kent fashions fancy dresses out of glass, Bart Hawe makes giant metal cookie cutters, and Paul G. Cunningham crafts curving, brightly hued geometric forms that appear rubbery but are actually mesh and pigment. They twist and pop at the same time.

Joan Konkel, who shows at Zenith Gallery, has long made paintings that incorporate metallic mesh. Here she is showing a two-panel work that, uncharacteristically, features a white backdrop. The result is appealingly spacious, and seems to activate new terrain for her work. Konkel could have introduced this innovation somewhere else, but it seems apt she chose wide-open Artomatic.

Artomatic 2017 On view through May 6 at 1800 S. Bell St., Arlington. artomatic.org.