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Sesow at Artomatic 2007

132 paintings in one room.
April - May 2007
Crystal City, VA

from a fairfax virginia paper:

Artomatic for the pe





Times

Visitors take in 90,00
during opening night
Artomatic is a free m
roughly 600 regional
and is held in Crysta

Arts extravaganza makes its Virginia

Arts extravaganza makes its virg

By Brittany Boyd
bboyd@timespapers.com

Artomatic, the Washington area's irreverent arts extravaganza, is back this spring and, for the first time, is happening on this side of the Potomac River.

Held four times since 1999, Artomatic has grown to become the region's largest one-of-a-kind multimedia event featuring roughly 600 regional artists and performers under one roof.

Open now through May 20, the free event sprawls 90,000 square feet of space on two levels (six and eight) of a plush Crystal City office building. Visitors are welcome to wander from room to room brimming with original painting, sculpture, photography and other creative work.

Artomatic also features special events, including musical and visual performances, poetry readings, art workshops for kids and adults, and a Cinco de Mayo celebration. Previous Artomatic shows have attracted as many as 50,000 visitors.

"The art that's down there will knock your socks off," said Patricia Hartnett, a McLean-based artist who is exhibiting at Artomatic for the first time this year. "Every room you go into, you don't know what to expect."

What makes Artomatic so unique is that anyone with the nominal $75 entrance fee can participate, and there is no jury or gallery curator to please. So, there is a wide range of work on display, from beginner to professional, and a whole lot of it.

The free-for-all event is the result of grassroots efforts made by area artists who came together in the late 1990s. Frustrated with the D.C. art scene, they wanted to create a cohesive exhibition and performance opportunity open to anyone, to build an audience for artists, and to highlight the need for artistic space in the area, said Artomatic chair George Koch, one of the original founding artists.

In 1999, the first Artomatic event was held at D.C.'s Manhattan Laundry on Florida Avenue. The name "Artomatic" came as a play on words after the hand-operated "Coin-O-Matic" laundry machines that occupied the Manhattan Laundry building. "Artomatic" was originally hyphenated "Art-O-Matic." The hyphens were later dropped.

In 2005, Artomatic became a 501(c)3 nonprofit run by a board of directors made up of local artists and supporters and a steering committee of local artists, arts administrators and community activists. The board develops outreach procedures and guidelines to solicit broad participation from artists in the Washington metropolitan area.

From now on, Koch said, Artomatic will be an annual event, most likely held in D.C.

Jesse Thomas, a Tysons Corner-based graphics designer, is exhibiting work at Artomatic for the second time this year. He participated at the last show in 2004 at the old National Children's Museum in southwest D.C.

The exposure from that event, Thomas said, propelled him to land a handful of additional art exhibits in D.C. and New York. "It was incredible."

Success also came for 2004 Artomatic artist Frank Warren who circulated blank postcards at the show for people to write down their secrets. He posted the creative responses online, and the site reportedly became the most visited blog site on Yahoo for weeks. In 2005, he got a book deal for "PostSecret."

Artomatic's location depends on what space organizers can score for free. Organizers seek out space that is empty for whatever reason and that they can temporarily take over, rent-free. In the past, building space was unoccupied because it was between tenants or in pre-renovation limbo.

This year, the Crystal City Business Improvement District, a public-private partnership between com-

Artomatic 2007

- **When:** Now through Sunday, May 20. Gallery hours are Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, noon-10 p.m.; Thursdays, noon-11 p.m.; and Fridays and Saturdays, noon-1 a.m. Closed Mondays.
- **Where:** 2121 Crystal Drive, Arlington, 6th and 8th floors
- **Cost:** Free
- **Information:** www.artomatic.org

ginia debut

mercial businesses within the BID district of Arlington County, was instrumental in bringing Artomatic to vacant, pre-renovation office space in Crystal City. The BID was interested in the increased foot traffic Artomatic would bring to help promote area business.

McLean-based photographer Ibi Hinrichs is exhibiting roughly two dozen black and white and color photographs at her Artomatic debut this year. She said she wanted to participate in Artomatic to gain exposure and be a part of the community of artists that Artomatic creates.

"[People] get isolated in this day and time and hear only negative things," Hinrichs said. "Being with all of the other artists is an experience that switches you out of that."

Koch, the Artomatic chair, said that building a sense of community among artists was one of Artomatic's founding principles. To help facilitate that, each participant must commit to volunteering 15 hours toward the event. "It's a chance for artists to get to know one another," Koch said.

He added that the onus of sustaining a vibrant arts community in the area falls on elected public officials and leaders in the arts community. "If you want to have a vibrant arts community, you have to pay attention to it and you have to do something to make it happen," he said, such as providing open space.

Each Artomatic visitor will find some work they like and some they do not and that discovery is really what it is all about.

Matt Sesow interviewed on morning news about artomatic

WATCH THE VIDEO CLIP HERE... (click to play):



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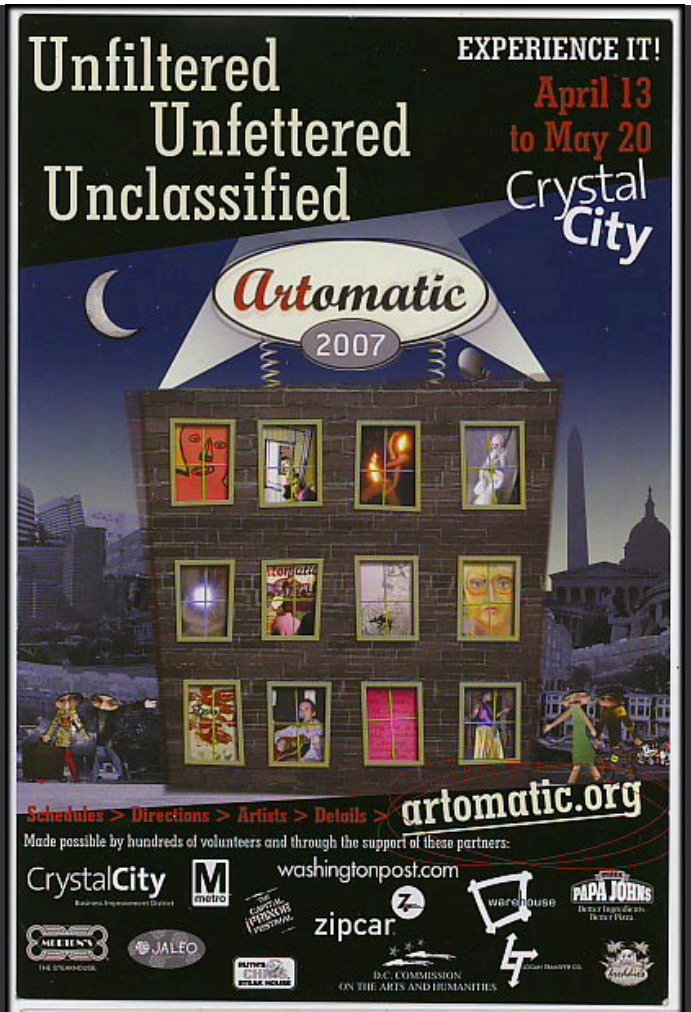
another matt sesow interview on artomatic

WATCH THE VIDEO CLIP HERE... (click to play):







Artomatic 2007

BY ARTISTS. FOR EVERYONE.

A bold, brash, 90,000 square feet of art for all to enjoy.

Feast on a unique conflux of visual and performing arts from 600+ area artists – day and night – during five weeks of collaborative, creative expression like none you've ever experienced.

2121 Crystal Drive, Arlington, Va.

Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday: noon-10 p.m.
Thursday: noon-11 p.m.
Friday, Saturday: noon-1 a.m.
Closed Mondays

Take Metro to the Crystal City Station, and follow the signs. Free evening and weekend parking is available. Artomatic.org has details and directions.

Admission is free.
Donations encouraged.

See more than 600 area artists including:

Presented in partnership with
the Crystal City Business Improvement District (BID) www.crystalcitybid.com

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BY MATT SESOW

Matt Sesow's "Free Range Amigo" is part of "Artomatic 2007."

Art for All

More than 500 local artists will show their paintings, sculpture, photography and other works at "Artomatic 2007," a 90,000-square-foot temporary space on two floors of a Crystal City office building. There will also be concerts, art workshops for children and adults, films, poetry readings and a Cinco de Mayo celebration. Admission is free.

"ARTOMATIC 2007" *Open through May 20, Fridays and Saturdays from noon to 1 a.m.; Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays from noon to 10; and Thursdays from noon to 11 (closed Mondays) at 2121 Crystal Dr., Arlington (Metro: Crystal City). 202-544-1005 or www.artomatic.org.*

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House
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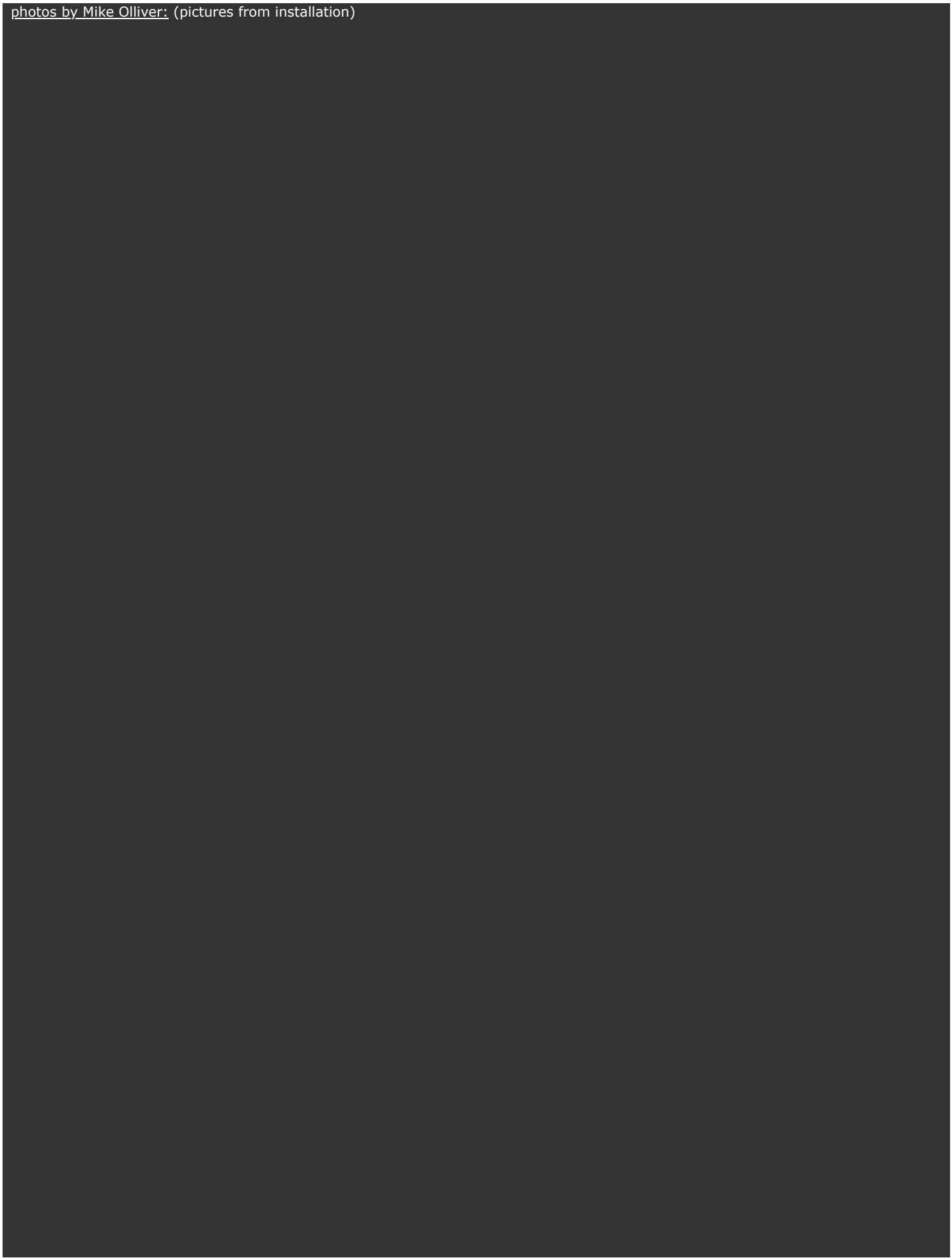
photos by Mike Olliver: (pictures from installation)




DAYLIGHT 60




m/o photo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barista



WASHINGTON CityPaper

artsandevents: showtell

No-Show Showdown

Are the volunteers who ditched Artomatic flaking out or sending organizers a message?

By Jessica Gould

Adams Morgan painter **Matt Sesow** adores Artomatic. "It's the greatest thing we have going on in D.C., other than the Smithsonian," he says. Artomatic began in 1999 as an effort to showcase local artists and bring their work to the public free of charge. For the inaugural event, Artomatic's Web site says, 350 artists "colonized" the Manhattan Laundry building on Florida Avenue NW, drawing more than 20,000 visitors in six weeks.

This year, Artomatic's in Crystal City, occupying two floors of the former U.S. Patent and Trademark building at 2121 Crystal Drive. Approximately 3,900 people visited Artomatic on its opening night, says Artomatic chair **George Koch**. "It's like an encyclopedia, a refresher, our own biennial, a democratic, open one," says art blogger and critic **Lenny Campello**. As always, Artomatic is unjuried, which means anyone can participate, as long as he or she pays a registration fee and volunteers some time to make the event function.

Volunteering is a crucial part of Artomatic, says volunteer coordinator and Artomatic artist **Rebecca Gordon**. Every year, the artists double as bartenders, greeters, and garbagemen, ushering the public into the building and

hauling empty beer bottles out. "It's one of the mechanisms by which we build community among artists and across artistic disciplines," Gordon writes in an e-mail.

Sesow especially likes the do-it-yourself spirit of Artomatic. On opening night, he and his girlfriend, fellow painter **Dana Ellyn**, doled out Red Bulls at one of Artomatic's makeshift bars. "My girlfriend and I just did what we said we would do," Sesow says.

Many Artomatic artists weren't as diligent. That night, only nine of the 18 people scheduled to close the space showed up. Four volunteers shirked their responsibilities in the shift immediately before that one, and a handful of artists were no-shows on Saturday. Now, the organizers are considering barring delinquent volunteers from participating in future Artomatic events.

Getting artists to volunteer has never been a problem in the past, Gordon says. "It's too early to make dire predictions, but it makes me sad to see participating artists flout the rules," she writes. According to Gordon, all Artomatic artists signed up for volunteer shifts. Visual artists (there are about 400 this year) are supposed to contribute three five-hour shifts; the 200 performing artists are expected to contribute one. All volunteers get e-mail reminders 48 hours before their shifts are scheduled to begin, and they can alter their schedules at any time.

But only one of the no-shows contacted Gordon to cancel, which meant volunteers already at the space had to take on additional shifts and other artists who were there to have a good time wound up spending the evening tossing trash and stocking toilet paper. "It leaves their fellow artists holding the bag and if it continues, it begins to reflect badly on everyone and it's certainly going to affect the overall morale," Gordon writes.

Jim Tretick, an artist who served as Artomatic's Event and Program Management Committee chair, says he found the number of no-shows dispiriting. "When we spend hours and hours and hours setting up a system and then we have to scramble to find bodies to serve beer, it's frustrating."

Gordon says she is stumped by the high number of no-shows. "Do we have an unusually large group of artists who don't feel a sense of responsibility to their fellow artists?" she writes. "Was it a mistake not to make punitive action for missed shifts a more prominent issue at registration? Do we need to do more PR about the volunteer nature of the organization?"

She worries that Artomatic is deteriorating into an us-vs.-them mentality. In an interview, she says a few "whiny" artists complained about their exhibit space: "They said, 'My wall space would be bigger,' " she says. But "there is no 'they.' There's only we."

Sondra Arkin, Artomatic's president, has also heard divisive talk. "Yes, I've seen this us/them thing creeping into AOM," she writes in an e-mail, "and while there are many explanations, partly the Board is at fault because a lot of our role (certainly mine as president) is organizing us better and protecting the brand."

One artist, who asked not to be named, says Artomatic's steering committee amounts to an in crowd with privileges when it comes to exhibition space and installation schedules, complaining that the disciplinary e-mails for missed shifts were too harsh. "I felt like the art Gestapo was e-mailing me and calling me to tell me I missed my shift," the

artist says.

Kathryn Williamson, a Rockville performance artist, says she was instructed not to install a wooden sculpture due to fire codes. "I think it's sort of turned bureaucratic," she says. "Some artists say they want to do something, and they say 'No, no, no.' "

In 2004, for the first time, Artomatic's steering committee elected a volunteer Executive Committee, which became the first board of directors. The reason, Arkin says, was Artomatic had a surplus of money and needed to deposit it in the bank. So it became a 501(c)3, complete with a nine-person board. It also applied for trademark protection. After all, Arkin says in an interview, while the organization is all about spreading Artomatic's mission and ethos, "we don't want someone to come around in five years and say we've trademarked the name, and you can't do Artomatic anymore."

Since 2004, Arkin writes, she has worked hard to "make it seem like there is someone in charge," but she wonders whether attempts to strengthen and streamline the event have had the unintended consequence of alienating some artists by making it seem like an institution was making the decisions. To counterbalance the sense of centralization, Arkin says she and fellow board members have sought to "empower a broader steering committee." Anyone can join Artomatic's organizing committees, and each committee chooses representatives to participate in the steering committee.

Whatever the cause for the shift-shirking, Artomatic's organizers are planning to address it. "The biggest option on the table is banning them from the next Artomatic event," Gordon says. For the all-inclusive arts extravaganza, those are fighting words. "It's a difficult discussion we're having. It's painful. You don't want to tell people to take their toys and go."

Arkin says the board isn't ready to ban artists—yet. This week, she says, she will "cajole and lay out some amnesty approach." And that approach may already be working. On Sunday, Gordon says, 35 out of 36 volunteers showed up for their Sunday shifts. "Maybe word got out."

Got Something for Show & Tell? Send tips to show@washingtoncitypaper.com. Or call (202) 332-2100, x 455.

PLEASE TAKE ME HOME

MORE ABOUT MATT SESOW



thanks for taking a look at my artomatic paintings.
I am a full-time painter living and painting in the adams morgan neighborhood of dc since 1994. i've been fortunate enough to live entirely off the sales of my paintings for the past seven years and credit artomatic as being significant to my success as a dc painter. i hope 'my wall' of paintings has inspired or invoked an emotional reaction from you today. my aim with displaying such a dizzying array of work was to invite criticism, admiration, or confusion. i enjoy painting emotionally charged works... i hope it shows. view my latest paintings, read interviews, and see my bio online at **www.sesow.com**
thanks again for taking a look ... my best, matt.

if you want to buy one of my paintings or visit my studio:
the best way to reserve a painting you see on the wall is to email me at **sesow@sesow.com** or leave a message at 202.319.1459. please leave the number of the painting you want and i'll hold it for you. thanks!

In July of 2003 i started the "31 DAYS IN JULY" project. Each morning in July i take the front page of the Washington Post and use the day's news as inspiration for creating a unique 30"x40" painting. each painting must be started on the morning it represents and all 31 must be completed by midnight July 31st. on july 1st 2007, the project will begin again. see the results at **www.sesow.com/31days.htm**





CONTACT INFO:

matt sesow updates his webpage all week with new paintings at:

www.sesow.com

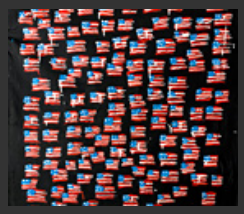
EMAIL: **sesow@sesow.com**

you can call matt directly on your phone at:

202.319.1459

some of the 2007 shows:

april: Oceanside, CA: solo show
Atlanta: 2 person show
may: Maine: solo show
DC: mount pleasant solo
DC: left bank group show,
june: Sacramento: solo show
New York: group show
july: Old Domin. Univ.: 2 person show
DC:, fringe fest warehouse theater
august: Denver: solo show
september: DC: adams morgan fest
DC: arts on foot
october: Atlanta: two person show



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