

Written by

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It has always been a nomadic monster, roaming the Quad Cities (usually Rock Island) in search of arts patrons. In recent years, it has squatted at The Villa, the McKesson building, and (most recently) the Rocket Theatre.

Now, in its 13th year, it has taken up temporary residence across the river in Bucktown, and it has also mutated. What was once a single-minded creature - all about selling art - has now evolved into something of an entertainer. To its already formidable arsenal it has added magic and improvisational comedy and a haunted dungeon.

Lucky 13: Great Mask Auction: Saturday, October 21, at the Bucktown Center for the Arts

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It is, of course, MidCoast Fine Arts' Great Mask Halloween Bash & Fine Art Auction, scheduled to start at 6 p.m. on Saturday, October 21, at the Bucktown Center for the Arts (225 East Second Street in downtown Davenport).

The centerpiece of the event (co-sponsored by the *River Cities' Reader*) is still the auctioning of dozens of works from area artists, but this year's Great Mask has been reworked to appeal to a broader audience. Because of its changing venues, the event has always managed to stay relatively fresh, but this year's changes are more drastic than a change of scenery.

With three hours of live auctioneering in past years, "it just seemed taxing for some people," said Dean Schroeder, MidCoast's executive director. There will still be a live auction starting at 8:15 p.m., but it will be limited to the 10 artworks that draw the highest bids in silent auction. The auction this year will feature 47 area artists, many of whose works will have Halloween or mask themes. The artists receive the proceeds from the auction, but many donate a portion of the sale price to MidCoast.

The event has been filled out with performances by magician Brian Thomas Moore (at 7 p.m.) and Comedy Sportz (9:30 p.m.), and a screening of *Night of the Living Dead* (10 p.m.).

The entertainment will be in one of Bucktown's fourth-floor condos, while the silent auction will be held in another condo, along with the bar, palm and tarot readings, and handwriting analysis. Food will be in the hallways between the condos. Four floors below will be a one-night-only haunted dungeon created by Larry Neiryck. And the annual costume contest will be done *American Idol* style and judged by Comedy Sportz performers.

"There's a lot more entertainment value," Schroeder said.

Larry DeVilbiss, who coordinates the event, said that artists have been encouraged to work in the media they're known for. In the past, he said, the event's Halloween and mask themes have prompted artists to play with new ideas and materials. "We encourage experimentation by all means," DeVilbiss said. But sale prices might have dropped because the artists' work wasn't recognizable as their own.

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The motifs haven't changed, but attendees are likely to see a greater diversity of themes this year. That shift is likely one of the smaller changes to this annual event.

And at least one big change is nearly certain for next year, as Bucktown will likely be a single-year host for the event. Great Mask rarely stays in one place long, and chances are excellent that it will have found a new building to haunt next year.

Tickets to the Great Mask Halloween Bash & Fine Art Auction are \$25 and available at the door or at The Wearhouse in Bucktown. For more information, visit (<http://www.midcoast.org>)