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Test Fest challenged artists to scour Skiles Test Nature Park for materials, create a masterpiece



Written by

Gretchen Becker

Broken dishes, barrels, twigs and mud were the tools artists used Saturday to create art in a Northeastside Park.

The inaugural Test Fest featured 11 artists, most local, but a few from outside of Indiana, creating art from what was already found at Skiles Test Nature Park.

It's part of the Made for Each Other community art series put on by Big Car in eight Indianapolis neighborhoods, said Big Car director Jim Walker. It's funded by a \$50,000 Imagine Big grant from the Great Indy Neighborhoods Initiative.

"We wanted it to be a minimal impact on the park," Walker said. "It's a hidden gem and a plot of land with cool history. We wanted to make something that can naturally fade back into the landscape."

Folklore says that the grounds and Test's former home that used to sit on the park property were haunted, and Walker thinks Test might have unknowingly been involved in the event planning. Test Fest happens to fall on Test's birthday.

Walker came up with the idea for the art project after watching a documentary.

Artists spread out throughout the 80.9-acre park to create masterpieces only from what they've found at the park. Art will be left to naturally deteriorate.

Parkgoers could watch the artists and had an area where they could contribute.

Flounder Lee, who teaches photography at Herron School of Art and lives in Fletcher Place, was one of the 11 artists on site Saturday.

"I don't get to do a lot of 3-D stuff, and I liked the idea of the challenge of only using something that's there," Lee said.

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Lee picked up pieces of broken dishes, left from Test's home that has since been demolished, and planned to create a sound installation using the dish pieces against a 55-gallon barrel he found on the grounds.

"I thought most people will do art using leaves and berries," Lee said. "I was also interested in how it was the old homestead."

Neighbors have worked hard in the last few months to clean up the park and add landscaping and programming, said Ray Brinkmeyer, president of the Friends of Skiles Test and member of the Binford Redevelopment and Growth organization that has sparked revitalization in the area.

"In the past five years, the park has gone from obscurity to people enjoying it with hiking and bike riding," Brinkmeyer said. "I think the goal here is to keep it as a nature park. What this event does, it reinforces the point it is a nature park."

Brinkmeyer hopes the event draws people to the park and word spreads about the art to draw more people in.

"Most people have never seen this kind of art," he said. "It will be interesting and one of a kind."

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