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### **SPARKcon and Visual Art Exchange Combine Forces**

SPARKcon and Visual Art Exchange (VAE) are proud to announce that SPARKcon will now be produced under the leadership of VAE. Over the past four years the grass-roots festival has become the Triangle's pre-eminent showcase of local talent and has grown to encompass more than 1200 performers including visual artists, musicians, fashion designers, poets, game designers, and others who choose to exhibit their creativity. In 2009, it is estimated that SPARKcon attracted more than 30,000 people across the 4 day fall festival.

"We have been partnering with VAE from the very beginning to have their Streetpainting Festival become an essential component of SPARKcon," says SPARKcon co-founder Aly Khalifa. "Now the festival has grown to such a scale, that we can really benefit from the incredible staff and resources that VAE commands for so many other great civic projects."

SPARKcon has gathered national attention for its innovative "open-source approach" to planning community events and highlighting local talent. Khalifa has made presentations of the SPARKcon system to civic leaders across the country including some from New Orleans.

The festival will continue to be planned by a corps of community volunteers.

"Both VAE and SPARKcon see our unique approach as essential to our mission and that it needs to be preserved," says Khalifa. "In fact, most volunteers won't notice a difference - except that they will now be supported by a dedicated staff."

SPARKcon is a "creative potluck" of SPARKs or creative themes such as art, music, film, fashion, etc. Each SPARK is put together by individuals who are deeply embedded in that specific local scene. Using a combination of networking and open calls for participants, organizers create diverse and representative events to show off local talent and connect disparate creative scenes. SPARKcon grows every time a new person gets involved with a SPARK category, creating their own event, or joining in to help an existing one. It's an open-source, "for the people, by the people" approach with an intentionally dynamic focus.

Some of SPARKcon's most well known SPARKS include artSPARK, bazaarSPARK, fashionSPARK, musicSPARK, filmSPARK, ideaSPARK, gamingSPARK, poetrySPARK, and danceSPARK.

VAE Executive Director Sarah Powers says that "SPARKcon fits VAE's mission to foster the advancement of and provide opportunities for all visual artists, particularly emerging, and to





increase community awareness, appreciation, and support of North Carolina artists. In addition, the program will help us be an even better resource for emerging artists in the community.”

SPARKcon and VAE have been partners in this weekend creativity festival since its inception in 2006. VAE’s Street Painting Festival was a community event that featured 200 street painters and was founded by the City of Raleigh in 1998. Since 2006, VAE has nearly tripled artist participation in artSPARK. This collaboration has allowed VAE to expand the event such that in 2009, VAE produced seven art events for six hundred emerging and professional visual artists.

SPARKcon has also grown since 2006. It was originally founded by several members of a Raleigh design collaborative called Designbox. Originally intended to be a conference and showcase of the creative community, it quickly grew to embrace more elements of different creative professions. Utilizing networking instead of advertising, it has snowballed from a few hundred people to more than 30,000. Several projects have resulted from this work, including facilitating the public to create the schematic design of Raleigh City Plaza.

This year, SPARKcon will take place Sep 16-20 in the very city plaza it helped design. The first general meeting is March 22 at 6:30 pm at Designbox.

