

What began as a suggestion for a budding artist to do a one-woman show has transformed into a community event of approximately 40 artists ranging from middle teens to middle age.

"Leigh Waltz of Live Art Network inspired me to do my own show," says 33-year-old Laurana Wong, a Dayton resident since 1999. "I wanted a warehouse space so I could do something big, but then it evolved into something other than me."

Wong is the sole organizer of The Sideshow, as the event is called, which will unfold at the Cannery building on June 24. She sees the event as an opportunity to take the economics and politics out of the customary art show staging experience.

"It's not about money, which drives a lot of shows in Dayton," she says. "There's so much competition between galleries. This is a free event for the community."

When asked what one can expect to find at the show, the answer seems to be everything and everyone.

"There'll be visual art, performance art, graffiti, tattoo, sculpture, installation, musicians, a play, everything," she says. "The artists are students and professionals, ranging from 16 years old to people in their 50s, though I don't think anyone is making a full-time living at it. Some of them are acquaintances, people I met at the coffee shop. Some people I've contacted after seeing their work elsewhere. The Pearl has a lot of really good stuff. Some people have come to me through MySpace, so there's been some word-of-mouth."

Wong explained her duties consist mainly of arranging the pieces, tailoring the space to suit the artists' needs, and of course, choosing which pieces will be shown.

"(The selected pieces) are probably skewed more toward who I am," she says. "But I'm careful not to discount something just because it's not my taste. I've been bombarded with people's ideas for the project. I can't do it the way they do, but I try to be affected by their ideas while retaining the concept, the center."

Given The Sideshow's approach, which includes several artists who have never been formally schooled or participated in an art show before, one wonders if "underground" is an appropriate way to describe some of the works, but Wong says that term depended on "who you run around with." She has a hard time putting the criteria for what she likes and dislikes into words.

"I'm a feeler, I try to capture the energy or emotion behind the work to see if it's real," she says. "Some work has a life of its own. I don't really inspect what it means. I just take it in and let my intuition tell me. Words don't really enter into it."

Although Wong says she's never thought of herself as an artist, she enjoyed drawing and working with crafts such as origami



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and jewelry while earning her Bachelors and Masters degrees in electrical engineering from the University of Tennessee.

"(At one point), I was taking more art classes than engineering classes," she noted. "Then I had a teacher that got me back into engineering."

Shortly before graduation, she was approached by Wright-Patterson Air Force Base with a position that she held until last January. In the meantime, she continued to experiment artistically (she participated in a performance art slam last October) before deciding to jump ship and venture into the unknown.

"I want to create art in every way," she says. "And my heart wasn't in my job anymore."

Since leaving Wright-Pat, Wong has been living off her 401k, which she estimates will sustain her for another year. She isn't sure what she'll do next, but presently The Sideshow has become a full-time gig. The 20-some hours per week that the show consumed at the beginning has escalated to 50-60 over the past few weeks.

"I see some manual labor in my future," she says. "But I'll be okay as long as I keep my hands in enough stuff. The

show has only cost about \$500. The Cannery space is free and everything else has been donated or salvaged. The only real expenses were for the wood, screws, incidentals, and the poster was a big thing. I had to make a point not to put all my own money into it. It has to be supported by the community."

Besides her own personal inspiration to put on the show, she seems to be motivated by something that quite a few natives lack—a love of the town.

"I like Dayton because it's an underdog," she says. "And there's so many artists here, I think one of the highest per capita. People here really go against the grain, and they're always trying to escape. But then they leave and come back, so I guess they love it after all."

For the moment, Wong is concentrating on pulling the final remnants of the show together while not dwelling too much on the outcome until it happens.

"I think it will be well received, and I hope it's continued," she says. "If I start to have expectations, I'll get stressed. I've had people come by to see what it's all about. That's how the Urban Nights people discovered it. People look it over and say, 'Wow, in Dayton?'"