

# ALL MEDIANY

Participatory Arts Festival Rocks New York for Another Year

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Impromptu dance parties with hula hoops, children and adults covered with glitter, a roaming brass band, and stilt-walkers dressed in white: welcome to this summer's Figment Festival. Figment, an annual participatory arts fest held last weekend on Governor's Island, drew over 25,000 attendees.

Replete with musical performances, art installations, and a variety of fun activities for adults and kids alike, Figment featured a mini-golf course (with each hole designed by a different artist), a "living pavilion" with a roof made of plants, a large metal tesla wheel, and over four hundred other art exhibits and activities spread across Governor's Island. Audiopolis, an exhibit which was set up inside the island's old military fort (Ft. Jay), involved motion sensors and speakers set up around the courtyard of the fort, and visitors walking around the courtyard changed the sound depending on how and where they moved. Arts collective Brooklyn Aerodome brought motorized, remote – controlled kites that children could fly themselves.

Other activities included a rose petal garden, where anyone could come and frolic in a tent full of rose petals, Aqua Attack, which was an "audience participatory Japanese style game show involving super hero costumes, kiddie pools and plush toys," and Brush Bot Painting, where one could control a robot to create a painting.

As a free, non-commercial event, Figment embraces the idea of allowing everyone access to and participation in art. At Figment, art is not just prestigious works on the walls of museums; it's about including a broad spectrum of artists who need an outlet for creative expression.

"People think of art as a commodity," said David Koren, founder and executive producer of Figment, "Art is thought of as something you only get if you can afford to. But art is for everyone. Art isn't just about these commodities, art is about an experience."

Governor's Island, Koren said, is an ideal place to hold Figment, because the island is owned by all New Yorkers equally. Originally a military installation, the island was opened to the public in 2003 after New York State acquired it from the Coast Guard. Its new charter prevents permanent housing and most kinds of development, making it an ideal place for public events such as Figment.

Beginning as a popular one-day art event in 2007, Figment has grown exponentially each year. Burning Man, an annual week-long arts event and temporary community in Nevada, heavily influenced the beginnings of Figment. Participants at Burning Man camp in the middle of the desert for a week, bringing everything they could possibly need (food, water, shelter, etc.) and then leaving no trace once they depart. "Burners [participants from Burning Man] speak the language of 'leave no trace', which is the ideal of Governor's Island," said Karen King, a designer from Brooklyn Aerodome.

Tenesh Webber and her daughter Maya, from Hoboken, have been attending the festival since it began three years ago. "My favorite exhibit was the 'Dream Tree', where you could write your dreams as a child and put it in the tree – that was really beautiful," said Tenesh. Her daughter, on the other hand, enjoyed the hula-hooping and the Brush Bots.

Because of its whimsical and inclusive spirit, Figment has evolved from a simple arts event to a massive festival with activities and enjoyment for all ages. For more information about Figment, check out their website at <http://figmentproject.org/2010/>.