

CENTERSTAGE

CHICAGO

The Original City Guide

Shop Like You're One of a Kind

Skip that holiday shopping trip to the mall and head over to the Merchandise Mart for an eclectic mix of artful gifts. Tuesday Dec 02, 2008. By Stacy Warden

Now that December has arrived, Chicagoans are as busy as ever with holiday festivities, party planning and Christmas shopping. Many of us spend half the weekend in our cars running all over town, accruing massive parking tickets just to find five things on our list. This year, we think you should do yourself a favor by spending an otherwise stressful shopping weekend at Chicago's eight annual One of a Kind Show.

With 60,000 square feet (there's a reason the Merchandise Mart has its own zip code) neatly sectioned into galleries (each showcasing a different medium), the One of a Kind Show will feature more than 500 juried artists and artisans from all across North America. Each artist will have his or her own station where you can browse leisurely and ask questions with guaranteed answers straight from the source. Exhibits include photography, painting, sculpture, glass, furniture, pottery, jewelry and wearable art, among others.

Last year, more than 35,000 shoppers attended the One of a Kind Show. In addition to a full lineup of national and local artists, 2007's event brought in local confectioners like Katherine Anne who provided complimentary samples of her handmade caramels and chocolates. The Wooden Spoon was also on site with plenty of tempting treats for purchase like chocolate-covered sunflower seeds, gourmet preserves and holiday gift baskets. This year should be just as tasty with its gourmet gallery featuring a range of specialty items including dips, sauces and baked goods from artisans like the Chocolate Gourmet, Heartland Herbs and Lehman's Orchard.

On Thursday, the show will open its doors at noon for an extra day of shopping and fun early-bird specials like the one-of-a-kind ornament sale. You can also feel good about your purchases, as 100 percent of Thursday's ticket sales will benefit the nationally recognized Children's Memorial Hospital. A number of exhibiting artists will also donate a percentage of their sales that day to support the hospital. One such artist, Thomas Mann, will share the love by selling his carefully designed Pocket Heart charms, hand-carved from cast pewter.

Style-savvy guests won't want to miss Friday night in the Fashion District, when the One of a Kind show kicks off the weekend with its trend show, special expert presentations and cocktails provided by DiVine (6 p.m.-9 p.m.). Beginning at noon on both Saturday and Sunday, Chicago fashion authority Julie Darling will act as personal stylist and shopper by sharing her favorite items from the show. Throughout the weekend, select artists will share their stories and inspiration and will provide 20-minute demonstrations on their respective skills and techniques.

In addition to its full schedule of activities, talks and demonstrations, Chicago's One of a Kind Show will also run concurrently with The Artist Project, located on floor 7 of the Merchandise Mart. The gallery-style exhibition will feature 100 emerging independent artists who will showcase work in 2D, mixed media, photography and sculpture.

Cost: Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$7 for seniors and students with a valid i.d. Children 12 and under are free. Tickets are available online at oneofakindshow.com and are also good for admission to The Artist Project.

Hours: Thursday, December 4, noon-9 p.m.; Friday, December 5, 11 a.m.-9 p.m.; Saturday, December 6, 10 a.m.-7 p.m.; and Sunday, December 7, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. For more information on the One of A Kind Show and Sale Chicago, please call (800) 677-6278 or visit the event website.

<http://www.centerstagechicago.com/art/articles/oneofakindpreview.html>

