

STEAMPUNK CARNIVAL

Steampunk style visits Asheville with music, artwork, brass goggles

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Free booze, live music and original artwork lured people to downtown art gallery ZaPow on Saturday night for the opening reception of the Steampunk Carnival art show.

"Steampunk is a merging of future technology with Victorian design," said Asheville resident Iman Payne. "You see everything from corsets to old school goggles, but with an iPhone."

Steampunk began as a fantasy literary subgenre celebrating the social and technological aspects of the 19th century. The name steampunk refers to a post-apocalyptic world where the steam-powered machines of the 19th century have mainstream use, according to steampunk.com, a website for information, costumes and culture for enthusiasts.

Steampunk fans eventually married the fantasy world into reality by steampunking everyday objects such as computers, telephones and jewelry. An object becomes steampunk'd by decorating it with brass or copper and enhancing it with engravings or etchings, according to steampunk.com.

A steampunk dresses in Victorian fashions such as corsets, top hats and trench coats. Asheville resident Mandy Shupe described the fashion as brown goth.

"It started as a hobby but became a lifestyle," said Ashley Leckwold, assistant to The Extraordinary Contraptions band. "My home isn't steampunk'd with accessories, but I will definitely put my jewelry on before I go out everyday."

ZaPow, which claims to be the only popular culture art gallery in the southeast, dedicated the first two walls of its 3,000 square foot space

to original artworks inspired by steampunk. The member artists of ZaPow, who pay a monthly fee for wall space to display their work, chose the steampunk theme for the show. Owner Lauren Johnson said each of the artists contributed a few original pieces inspired by the steampunk world.

Joshua Marc Levy created two works of art for the show. A flashlight-painting photograph captures the image of his wife wearing the steampunk goggles he purchased on Etsy shortly after discovering the theme of the show.

"There are different levels of steampunk. You have the hard-core steampunkers in complete Victorian dress, talking in accents and role-playing. And then there is the street level steampunk, which is more punk with ripped clothes and gadgets," Levy said.

Images of top hats, metal fairy wings and 19th century bicycles filled the two walls of the gallery.

Steampunk elephants rode bicycles and steampunk puppies wore the old school goggles that Payne and Levy mentioned as being central to the steampunk fashion.

In the back of ZaPow, French Broad Brewing Company poured free beer into red plastic cups while The Extraordinary Contraptions performed. The Atlanta-based quartet fit Levy's description of hard-core steampunkers.

Dressed in corsets, wigs and velvet pants, the group performed their steampunk rock music with theatrical flair.

In the front of the gallery, Johnson tended to the permanent line of customers waiting to purchase various art pieces.

"It's a cool idea if they were making the clothes, but instead they just end up spending a lot of money," Payne said.



Photo by Ricky Emmons - Photography Editor

Zachary Galiwas shows off his steampunk attire at the Steampunk Carnival art show.