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John Eric Jackson

By Jeff Roedel

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John Jackson is saddled with one of those dilemmas that lots of people have probably told him is "a good problem to have." His baby, the Art Melt, was expected to draw about 800 people to the Brunner Gallery at the Shaw Center for the Arts last July. Nearly 3,000 showed up for the event, transforming a juried art show into more of a "you had to be there" block party with a side of graphic art, rather than a traditional exhibit opening.

AGE: 30

HOMETOWN: Ragley, Louisiana

TITLE: President, GreenScreenTV / Committee Chairman The Art Melt / Promotions and Marketing Director SoGo Live

"It was a social event," Jackson says. "And in a true art opening sense, it was quiet, and you were able to look at the work and live with it a little bit. Next year I want to have the art up for at least a week or two. It's moving in that direction, but we weren't quite there financially this year."

Still, the turnout got people talking, and it brought them to Third Street.

"I was speechless," Jackson says about the second annual event. "I couldn't stop smiling the next day."

Since July some have suggested hosting Art Melt seasonally. But multiple Melts in 2006 would be a tall order for sponsor Forum 35's all-volunteer army. Jackson says a semi-annual schedule would require supervision by the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge or another organization with a salaried staff.

In September Jackson became the director of promotions and marketing for SoGo Live. He is working with the producers of All The Kings Men to trumpet a December premiere for the film at the Manship Theatre. He hopes the party will attract Hollywood elite and double as a fundraiser for hurricane relief.

As a young entrepreneur and an artist, Jackson proved the perfect catalyst for the Art Melt. He saw that The Arts Council was doing great work with grants and Fest-For-All, but was not necessarily geared toward establishing a large-scale juried art show. As a photographer he realized the task it was to galvanize young independent artists.

"So you need an outside organization that's going to host it and put money into it," Jackson says. "And that's where Forum 35 came in."

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Photo by Marie Constantin