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BY BILL MCGRAW

# Raid at Detroit art gallery sows the seeds of rebellion

## Cultured crowd protests law with festival

JUNE 9, 2008

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The DJ was spinning old records by James Brown, Aretha Franklin and the Meters during Funk Night last weekend, when the heavily armed cops dressed in commando-style uniforms burst into the west-side Detroit art gallery.

**ADVERTISEMENT**   The cops yelled at the patrons to hit the floor. Witnesses said some officers used their feet to force down a couple of people who failed to move fast enough or asked too many questions.

Detroit police conduct raids frequently for all sorts of illegal activity, and the public never hears a thing. But cops almost never raid art galleries filled with young hipsters, students and at least one lawyer. So this May 30 raid, not unexpectedly, is turning out to have an afterlife: The gallery and patrons have decided to fight back, and the American Civil Liberties Union has become involved.

The site of the raid, the Contemporary Art Institute of Detroit -- CAID -- on Rosa Parks Boulevard, is a nonprofit that, for 29 years, has promoted art and art education in Detroit. Aaron Timlin, CAID's executive director and a Detroit booster, notes that CAID's current exhibit, architectural designs to improve neighborhoods, is cosponsored by the City of Detroit.



SUSAN TUSA/Detroit Free Press

Aaron Timlin, executive director of the Contemporary Art Institute of Detroit, started an art festival to keep the gallery going 24 hours a day through Saturday. And, he said, "We're going to dance without a permit."

To patrons, Funk Night, which lasts from midnight to 5 a.m., is a popular monthly dance party that is the laid-back essence of a sophisticated city.

"Most of the people are young, instead of a bunch of young girls and old men, like at a dance club," said Brittany Dallas, 19, a Wayne State University student who was ticketed at the raid. "Since it is an art gallery, there are really cool, cultured people ... instead of at a dance club, where there are people that are trying to get you drunk and take you home."

To the police, CAID was a blind pig, where people were buying beer after hours. They handed out 130 tickets for loitering in a place where alcohol was being sold illegally and impounded 44 cars, which cost \$900 to get back.

Cops found no drugs, no weapons, no people with outstanding warrants.

Police spokesman James Tate said officers warned Timlin about violations during a visit several weeks ago. "We don't often do that," Tate said. "He was advised of the issues he needed to clarify."

Timlin confirmed the visit, but said he believed he had made the necessary changes. He said the police told club officials May 30 that they also need a permit to allow dancing.

"Everyone thinks it's ridiculous we have to have a permit for dancing," Timlin said late last week.

Timlin, 37, is an art promoter and provocateur who once stood in boxer shorts at East Warren and I-75 to promote an exhibit, and another time walked from Detroit to New York wearing a cardboard box.

He asked why CAID can't get a break on laws about dancing, for instance, when the city, as he puts it, "bends the rules" on taxes and other issues to convince large companies to locate downtown.

As a response to the raid, Timlin has launched a week-long arts festival that started at midnight Friday and will end with a concert Saturday.

Timlin is lining up bands, artists, lecturers, filmmakers and others to keep the CAID going 24 hours a day for 8 days.

"We're going to dance without a permit," he said. "If we get a ticket, we'll fight the ticket and change the law. People should be able to dance where they want."

A number of patrons and their parents said that they can understand getting a ticket, but they are livid



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about having cars impounded and having to pay \$900 to the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office.

The payment is based on a state law that allows police to impound cars for drivers accused of involvement in drinking, gambling, drug and prostitution violations.

Patrons have court dates starting today. Many plan to plead not guilty and ask for a trial. An ACLU-affiliated lawyer will be there.

Spokeswoman Rana Elmir said the ACLU is investigating the case and is alarmed by "masked police officers in commando uniforms needlessly storming peaceful gatherings" and seizing cars.

Elmir asked why the police, if they had a problem with CAID's alcohol policy, didn't deal with the gallery itself. So far, the gallery has not been ticketed, Timlin said.

"I still don't understand it at all," said Michael Mazzola, 21, of Mt. Clemens, a sous chef at a Detroit restaurant. "It was just a group of kids and a big dance floor. I was just there hanging out with friends."

The raid also has raised questions about whether raiding art galleries is the best use of a police force that even Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick acknowledges is significantly understaffed.

"Absolutely," said Tate. "Because this is a violation. What's the difference between this location and a location we raided two weeks ago? The law is the law. We can't treat two types of businesses differently."

Timlin said the 192-hour art festival this week will be alcohol-free, but in featuring dancing, he seems to be asking for more trouble.

"We're standing up for what we believe in," Timlin said. "We'd prefer that the police come and dance with us."

Contact **BILL McGRAW** at [bmcgraw@freepress.com](mailto:bmcgraw@freepress.com).

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