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## Trading Art for Health Care

By REBECCA ROTHBAUM

For the past week, artist Lisa Lozano has been weaving a seven-mile length of red jute through the trees of a 19th-century cemetery in Kingston, N.Y.

Ms. Lozano, who has exhibited large-scale string installations on Governors Island and at New York University, says the commission is vitally important—and not because of the pay (nil) or prestige (debatable). In exchange for her art, she'll get her teeth cleaned.



Natalie Keyssar for The Wall Street Journal  
Organizers prepare for the annual O+ Festival, where artists receive health care in exchange for taking part.

The 34-year-old New York artist is one of more than 100 musicians, painters and performers taking part in the second annual O+ Festival in Kingston this weekend. Named for the blood type, the festival allows artists to barter works and performances for health care in the form of back adjustments, blood work, dental fillings and eye exams.

Kingston dentist Thomas Cingel initially came up with the idea as a way to lure artists upstate. Dr. Cingel, who completed his dental residency in New York City, said he settled in the Hudson Valley for its natural beauty, yet missed the big city's music scene.

"New York is only 90 miles south," he said. "I just thought, let's get some music rolling through here."

In May 2010 he emailed the Brooklyn indie band Monogold, promising them dental services in exchange for playing a Kingston show. The note reached the band's manager, who asked a local friend, Alexandra Marvar, if she knew the music-loving dentist.

"She was like, 'Is this guy for real?'" recalled Ms. Marvar, a writer, photographer and web designer.



Natalie Keyssar for The Wall Street Journal  
Alexandra Marvar, right, leaps in an effort to hang artwork for the O+ festival.

Within weeks, a committee that included Dr. Cingel, Ms. Marvar and several of their artist and doctor friends had begun planning the first festival. Organizers say the event, held last October—with Monogold on the bill—provided artists with an estimated \$40,000 of medical care.

This year's festival will be headlined by the orchestral pop act Nicole Atkins and the Black Sea, and will include installations like Ms. Lozano's, performance art from Linda Mary Montano, film screenings and a live recording of RISK!, comedian Kevin Allison's podcast.

Entry to the festival is competitive, particularly for musicians: This year, 90 acts vied for 25 slots. Artists—who may or may not have health insurance—are chosen for their quality of work rather than their medical needs, organizers say.

Once accepted, artists submit a list of treatments they would like to receive. Organizers use the list to assemble the team that will staff and dispense care at a makeshift clinic in a former hotel ballroom. Dental and eye exams will take place in local doctors' offices.

Treatments will include everything from basic physicals to orthopedic work. If an artist needs a more serious procedure, caregivers will schedule follow-up appointments.

For Ms. Lozano, whose string works normally sell for at least \$3,000, "a dental visit is extraordinary," she said.

The O+ Festival comes amid several efforts aimed at helping uninsured artists. Since 2005, Woodhull Medical Center in Brooklyn has

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run Artists Access, which issues credits for health care in exchange for work, such as painting a mural at the hospital. And arts groups such as New York's Signature Theater Company and New York Live Arts offer health insurance through artist-in-residence programs.

"Artists should not be falling through the cracks," said Dr. Art Chandler III, director of hospitalists at Columbia Memorial Hospital in Hudson, N.Y., and overseer of the festival's clinic. "They contribute so much to what makes a community worth living in."

More than 40 doctors and nurses, along with acupuncturists and massage therapists, will work the festival. Artists can receive follow-up care through the Institute for Family Health, a medical group with offices in the Hudson Valley and New York City that charges fees on a sliding scale.

"It's not a long-term fix, but hopefully this event keeps a dialogue going about health care," said Jeff Mercel, a festival organizer and former member of the band Mercury Rev. Mr. Mercel, who now composes music for film and television, recalled that he once paid more than \$8,000 for an appendectomy when he lacked health insurance.

Ms. Atkins, who has appeared on "The Late Show with David Letterman" and at music festivals like Bonnaroo, was insured through a performers' union after signing with Columbia Records. But she has gone without care since splitting with the label in 2009, a move that forced her to use a credit card to finance the removal of her wisdom teeth.

At O+, she said she plans to see a chiropractor for back problems and will also have her teeth cleaned.

"This is way better than any fee we could have arranged," she said.