



Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

Elizabeth Stephens, left, and Annie Sprinkle in "Exposed: Experiments in Love, Sex, Death and Art" at Collective: Unconscious in TriBeCa.

Amid Bare Breasts and Love Stories, Audience Participation

A warning: breasts will be bared in "Exposed: Experiments in Love, Sex, Death and Art," a new show at Collective: Unconscious in TriBeCa. Since Annie Sprinkle, the pornography star turned performance artist, is a key participant in the proceedings, this is not entirely surprising. But amateur exhibitionists, too, are given

a chance to display their wares in one of the evening's interactive moments, when Ms. Sprinkle and Elizabeth Stephens, her partner in three of the four titular experiences, swarm the audience with digital cameras early on, looking for volunteers to join the party.

After a few moments of fraught silence, and at the encouraging of the jolly Ms. Sprinkle and the earnest Ms. Stephens, up came the shirts and on went the show. The conceit behind this loosely assembled evening of musings on creation, procreation and threats to same is that audience and performers are together in the "love art laboratory." The world being grim these days, Ms. Sprinkle and Ms. Stephens don traditional white coats to play research scientists of sorts, determined to fill the world with a little more love, with the help of public recruits.

Exposed

Experiments in Love, Sex, Death and Art

Created and performed by Elizabeth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle; directed by Neon Weiss; media design and sound by Sheila Malone; lab assistants, Scout Durwood, Morty Diamond and Zhenesse Heinemann; costumes by Piedmont Boutique; production manager, Aaron Lemon Strauss. Presented by Collective: Unconscious, Caterina Bartha, producer; R. Justin Hunt, general manager/associate producer. At the Collective: Unconscious, 279 Church Street, at White Street, TriBeCa; (212) 352-3101. Through May 12. Running time: 1 hour 30 minutes.

If audience participation ranks somewhere near root canals on your list of favorite things, fear not. These interludes are brief and mild, and include a raffle. For the most part, Ms. Sprinkle and Ms. Stephens concentrate on giving us a guided tour of their own history together. The evening is a scrapbook of memories about their lives as partners, both personal and professional.

These are deeply intertwined, it becomes clear, as Ms. Sprinkle and Ms. Stephens describe their evolving relationship in monologues amusingly if confusingly delivered simultaneously. The fabulously buxom Ms. Sprinkle is a naturally adorable raconteur, sort of like a naughty Dolly

Parton, but dressed incongruously as an opera diva of the old school, in glam floor-length dresses with matching jackets. Ms. Stephens sports a buzz cut, mannish pants and a glittery top, and has the friendly, slightly ingratiating aspect of a Las Vegas M.C.

Once friends and occasional collaborators on the East Coast, they reunited several years later in San Francisco. Hot sex and true love soon blossomed. When the gay-marriage movement began to percolate, Ms. Sprinkle and Ms. Stephens decided to hop aboard, despite ambivalence about the institution from a feminist, economic and political perspective. (Audience input is sought as the show stops for an instant forum on this contentious issue.)

While they were late for the San Francisco gay-marriage free-for-all of a few years back (a party-pooing injunction stilled the festivities), they decided to incorporate nontraditional wedding ceremonies into their recurring artistic collaboration.

"Exposed" is part of a project spanning seven years. Each year kicks off with a wedding ceremony color-coded to match one of the hues of the body's "chakras," the meaning of which remains vague to me despite the brief lecture helpfully provided. In any case, a slide show from

their ceremonies dating back to 2004 suggests that Ms. Sprinkle and Ms. Stephens will have no need to hire a wedding consultant to think up innovations as their project continues. Possibly Martha Stewart's cadre of nuptial experts could take a few tips from them.

"Exposed" is not all happy memories and risqué game-playing, however. A comic interlude explores their fruitless attempts to have a child. Another slide show reveals in gory detail Ms. Sprinkle's bout with breast cancer, now fortunately in the past. The terror of this experience was a little alleviated by their determination to treat chemotherapy sessions as a continuing madcap fashion show. (Touchingly, Ms. Stephens shaved her own head in solidarity as Ms. Sprinkle's auburn tresses fell victim to the treatments.)

Cynics on the subject of performance art may wonder whether simply doing lots of kooky things and taking pictures of them necessarily qualifies as art-making, but Ms. Sprinkle and Ms. Stephens are convincing proselytizers for the healthy idea that life is more enjoyable — and its horrors are less overwhelming — if you can treat all its twists and turns as fodder for aesthetic inspiration.