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Motion-Activated Painting: Forget Smocks, Forget Clothes—These Artists Intend to Get Messy

By [Andrew Russeth](#) 4/02 4:52pm



Rosenberg's performance at Martos. (Courtesy Stefan Roemer)

On a cold and rainy Friday evening in late February, dozens of people crowded into the back room of Chelsea's Martos Gallery during its opening reception for Aura Rosenberg's new show. They stood around a large rectangle of black velvet, waiting for a

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performance organized by the artist to start. Eventually a man and woman walked in. They were young and lithe and naked. “Oh *no*,” someone groaned. People began shooting photos and videos.



A still from Rosenberg's performance. (Courtesy Stefan Roemer)

The pair took turns using a brush to paint the sides of their bodies and faces with white paint and then gingerly helped each other down onto the velvet. They made an imprint of their bodies on the fabric such that they appeared to hold each other closely. They were dignified and graceful, and they left to roaring applause, having completed the final one of Ms. Rosenberg's paintings of sexual positions based on zodiac signs. The other 11 were hanging on the walls.

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Public painting performances—many of the naked variety—are back. Depending upon the quality of execution, they run the gamut from the stuff of hopped-up Burning Man-style creatives, the kitschiest of the kitsch, to events reminiscent of the über-elegant French artist Yves Klein, who in 1960, clad in a tuxedo, famously directed naked ladies covered in his trademark blue to smear themselves on canvas to the sound of a string quartet. But regardless of their outward tone, these latter-day versions share a common desire to counteract the deadening trend of art's digitization and underscore the pleasure of experiencing it in the flesh.