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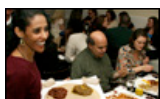
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Sightlines

## Dotty-Mouthed

Post-porn performer Annie Sprinkle returns after eight years  
**by John Beer**  
May 8th, 2007 10:11 AM

It's been almost 20 years since Annie Sprinkle first demonstrated the performance potential of a speculum in Post-Porn Modernist. Back then, Sprinkle's persona as a sex-positive ingenue formed a compelling counterpart to Karen Finley's avenging fury, each in her own way pushing back against the sexual repression of the Reagan-Bush era. Now that Sprinkle has returned to the New York stage, eight years after her last performance, what does she have to say about our current, and still deeply confused, sexual politics?

Not too much, at least explicitly. *Exposed*, part of Sprinkle's seven-year collaboration with her partner, the artist Elizabeth Stephens, is a more conventionally autobiographical work than Sprinkle's earlier performances. Of course, conventional is relative; the performance opens by inviting audience members to bare their breasts (several people rose to the occasion) and later uses transgendered assistant Morty Diamond as a canvas for illustrating the theory of chakra. But the basic structure of *Exposed* comes from the major events of Sprinkle and Stephens' life together. They fall in love, get married, try to have a baby, struggle with Sprinkle's breast cancer. These triumphs and defeats are related in a series of loose, rambling monologues, with Stephens often taking the lead. Sprinkle's boundless geniality can sometimes seem to conceal an inner reserve, while Stephens, a less polished performer, comes across as incapable of insincerity. Early on, they compare themselves to Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, as well as to Sonny and Cher. Both comparisons are apt. Sprinkle and Stephens have at times a slightly dotty, self-absorbed air, and their performance has the hit-or-miss quality of a '70s variety show, but throughout it they remain consistently fascinating and



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immensely likable.

Overt politics only comes up in the context of Sprinkle and Stephens' marriage—denied a license when San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom's gay-marriage initiative was shut down, they opted for their own ceremony with Fluxus artist Geoffrey Hendricks presiding. The real political lessons of *Exposed* lie deeper, in the loving solidarity, for instance, that leads Stephens to shave her own head during Sprinkle's chemotherapy, documented in a set of striking photographs ("cancer erotica," they half-jokingly call them). Sprinkle and Stephens take dippy California mysticism and dime-store audience-participation tricks (Exquisite Corpses?) and somehow transmute them into hope. The world's a little closer to utopia with them in it.

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