

We dig Santa Cruz just as much as this couple digs their relationship. Take note of our annual hits and misses.



BEST

CRITICS' PICKS

★ BEST MARRIAGE/ART PROJECT/
CATALYST FOR HEALING

LOVE ART LAB BY ANNIE SPRINKLE AND DR. BETH STEVENS (LOVEARTLAB.ORG)

Think of this as a post-modern spin on the old proverb "Make Love, Not War." Four years ago, artists Elizabeth Stevens and Annie Sprinkle were so turned off by all the violence, war and moral divisiveness in the world that they got turned on by something that could provoke change: love. Mainly theirs. More specifically, they wanted to spread their love through art. What followed may be one of the most inspiring love stories to ever find its way out of the creative birth canal of Santa Cruz County. Dubbed Love Art Lab, Stevens and Sprinkle have committed themselves to having seven weddings, one every year through 2011. Each commitment ceremony focuses on a specific chakra, or energy field in the body. In 2005, the first wedding ceremony unfolded. But, as onlookers would soon discover, the Sprinkle-Stevens union would prove to be both mind-bending and thought provoking. The first year/first chakra color highlighted was red and the overall theme was security and survival. (Interestingly enough, that was the year Sprinkle survived breast cancer. In another surprising turn, a great deal of art and performance art was created around that—"Chemo Fashion," "Bald Love" and "Love Infusion" among them.) Things look even brighter for 2008, which unfolds dramatically May 15-18 at UC Santa Cruz. The fourth year/fourth chakra (heart) color is green and the theme is love and compas-

sion. "What we do is have multiple weddings, and we make various vows," notes Sprinkle, who has carved out a delicious niche for herself working the fringe of society—long ago, she tossed aside a life as an adult film actress and morphed into an acclaimed performance artist and sexologist. (Her latest hot read "Dr. Sprinkle's Spectacular Sex—Make Over Your Love Life" is a pageturner.) "The first wedding we made vows to each other and to our seven-year Love Art Lab project," she adds. "The second wedding we made 100 vows to 100 members of our community. The third wedding we got legally married in Canada. This time we will make vows to enter into a committed relationship with the Earth—we'll take the Earth as our lover." Stevens, a trans-media artist and associate art professor at UC Santa Cruz says this: "Public rituals and performances create community. Others love to be involved in our work because the work provides an opportunity for collaboration and generosity. Our work gives permission." If anything, Stevens and Sprinkle deliver hope in a way few have seen before. After all, we still seem to live in an era where governments continue to stew over who and how you can love. It's not quite the same with whom and how you can kill. Take a look. Wars go on with seemingly no end in sight. But the minute you want to love—particularly the same gender—regulations prohibiting the very act can often be put into place. There's a reason for that. Love is one of the most powerful, healing energy forces on the planet. It's often feared. Stevens and Sprinkle obviously are privy to this. With Love Art Lab, they remind us of that fact and somehow manage to unite people and communities in an effort to create real change. Cheers to this union. | Greg Archer