



The Love Art Lab

What happens when artist, professor and dyke playboy Elizabeth Stephens falls for former porn star, stripper, sexologist and performance artist Annie Sprinkle?
Words Joanna Walters Photo Randal Allen Smith

ANNIE SPRINKLE, 53

I first met Beth when she came to my door in Manhattan to collect one of my tit prints for her queer art show in 1991. I was making paintings by using my breasts as paintbrushes. I wasn't a lesbian - I was just becoming interested. I'd made porn with women, but very het porn.

Beth had these lovely big eyes and beautiful smile. She was so friendly. She had a powerful, hot lover then. I thought, I would like to have sex with her one day. I was just starting to experiment with women. I had had a female-to-male transsexual lover. I was sort of bisexual, not yet the 90% lesbian I later became. I was still doing prostitution, just a few clients, and some call-girl stuff.

I was making experimental arty porn,

BETH STEPHENS, 46

I'd had three big loves in my life and was happy being single for the rest of my life when I met Annie. I'd barely heard of her but people told me to seek her out. She was a big fag hag. We considered her queer even if she didn't. When I went to collect the tit print for my Masters, I got a hard on. I'd seen her in a sex education video for dykes - this butch UPS parcel delivery woman making love to Annie Sprinkle - it was HOT.

When I returned the tit print, I was cold so she gave me a scarf - green velvet. The next year I invited her to model in my show about the joys of female objectification for feminists and lesbians, as a motorcycle mama on my Harley.

I became a professor at UC Santa Cruz

'We only got out of bed because I had a therapy appointment. I invited her. Couples therapy for a first date - hilarious'

and a bit of mainstream. Between 1991 and 2002 we were professional artist peers and casual friends. In 2002 I got my PhD at the Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality in San Francisco. I went to the Queer Arts Festival to celebrate and ran into Beth. She was celebrating getting tenure. For me, it was love at first kiss. Her kiss was so powerful. She is a triple Scorpio. We stayed in bed for three days and three nights and only got up because I had a therapy appointment. I invited Beth. It was hilarious. I recommend it - couples therapy for a first date.

We moved in together after a few months - I brought the U-Haul. I love her teeth and her soft hair. She's very passionate about art and she is good at buying property. That's handy as we always have stuff to talk about. When I'm with Beth I don't drink, to support her in her sobriety.

I had some really crazy relationships and was starting to think it was better to have lovers, not relationships. But I'm crazy about her. I've never been so in love.

and invited Annie to give a lecture about her work, such as her Public Cervix Announcement performance, where she used a speculum and torch to show the audience her cervix.

When we met up in 2002 it turned out we were both single. We had our first date and first kiss at Annie's house. The truest kiss I'd ever had. I'd found my soulmate. Then we went on a road trip and that sealed the deal.

I stopped drinking about 22 years ago because I took it to excess. I don't miss it.

Annie and I tried to have a baby. My biological clock was ticking. Our dog Bob inspired our famous piece *Cuddle*. Annie got breast cancer and we made art out of her cancer treatments.

Our commitment is to make art about love, that's warm and fuzzy with a thought-provoking edge. As a way of protesting the war and violence. And people feeling unloved. My best friend died of cancer. Love makes you want to create things. Art is what we create together. **D**

Annie Sprinkle (right) and Elizabeth Stephens will present the *Love Art Lab* in London in September as part of the International Workshop Festival www.workshopfestival.co.uk.

They perform *Exposed: Experiments in Love, Sex, Death and Art* at the Chelsea Theatre, World's End Place, King's Road, London SW10 ODR, 020 7352 1967, www.chelseatheatre.org.uk, September 19th-22nd, 7pm.

On September 22nd 2pm-5pm they host *Extreme Kissing: a workshop on kissing as art and intervention*; one hour at the theatre followed by a two-hour continuous kiss on King's Road (bring a partner).