

Arts, not smarts

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Street level in Toronto



According to Art Battle co-founder Simon Plashkes, the purpose of the monthly live competitive painting event at Queen West's Great Hall is "to start a conversation about what makes good art."

That conversation is not always as sophisticated as you might think. Just ask Les Paterson. The self-described "Mexican soccer team of Art Battle" competed for the eighth time last Wednesday, and for the eighth time was rejected by the voting audience.

Here's how Art Battle works: Painters are given a palette of acrylics, a blank canvas and 25 minutes. The audience votes on a favourite, and everything gets auctioned. Unsold work gets destroyed.

"If you can draw a pretty girl, you're off to the races," said Paterson, leaning on a post and watching another round of artists frantically trying to create a saleable painting. The part-time artist, who's garnered acclaim for off-beat projects—including recreating the art of Marge Simpson and mailing 1,000 crushed pop cans to members of Parliament—said landscapes and abstracts do well. His "neo post-modernism," not so much.

"I had to destroy my own painting with a chainsaw at one event," he said, with a hint of pride. "People just don't like things if they're weird."

But he's keeping at it. His jarringly bright painting of the words "YOUR AD HERE" went for \$30 at auction—one dollar more than the minimum bid of \$29.

The next Art Battle happens March 27.