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D.C. artist puts people on a boat in the buff, concerned neighbor calls cops

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There are two kinds of naked in the art world: "Performance art" and "Call the police." Saturday's show at Conner Contemporary Art featured both, which made for a lively opening night.

The gallery in the Trinidad neighborhood of Northeast Washington invited art lovers to see three solo exhibits. In the large front room was "Infinity," a "conceptual installation" by D.C.-based artist John Kirchner. The artist stripped a 1955 Chris-Craft motorboat, flipped it upside down and (just for opening night) asked three performers to sit, stand and pose pensively on the hull.

Without, you know, clothes.

The two-hour performance was the highlight of the evening. "We probably had 500 to 600 people that night," said co-owner Leigh Conner. As a precaution, Conner posted someone at the door to make sure no unaccompanied kids slipped in. After the show was over, the performers -- two women and a man -- donned clothing and sipped wine with the crowd. "It was a great art event," Conner told us.

About this time, the cops showed up. Although no one had complained to the gallery, someone called the police. Although the lights of the exhibit were low, passersby could see the performers through the windows. One policeman came into the gallery and asked Conner, "Were they naked?" Yes, she answered. Were they going to be naked again that night? Nope, she said. "Okay, then," said the officer and, after chatting a bit about the exhibit, left.

The incident quickly made it onto the local blog Frozen Tropics: "Apparently we've reached the point that we don't have any real crime over here because 5th District Officers responded to a call about naked people at an art gallery. ...Thank God we have an alert citizen out there on the watch for naked people engaged in performance art."



No other complaints; looks like most of the neighbors were prepared to turn the other cheek. "That's the thing about art -- it's very subjective," said ANC Commissioner Tina Laskaris, who attended the opening. "I like illustrators like Norman Rockwell, but that doesn't mean things like this should be necessarily...how should I say, undervalued."