

What's on display at the art gallery?

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I always thought art openings were cool places to meet men. They cater to an upscale crowd. Men who have an appreciation for the finer things in life. And whose interests extend beyond screaming at hockey games, scarfing down hot dogs and chugging beer.

This particular Friday evening was a big one for galleries, giving me an extensive choice. There were events in the La Brea area, in Beverly Hills and Santa Monica. Each of these neighborhoods has its own particular atmosphere and ambience. On La Brea you find the hip-hop and punk crowd; Santa Monica is cerebral and eclectic; and Beverly Hills is trendy and surgically augmented.

Then my eyes lit on the masterpiece I'd been waiting for.

I opted for a gallery at Bergamot Station in Santa Monica. Now all I had to decide was what to wear.

De rigueur attire for gallery openings, as for most parties and clubs in L.A., is some combination of black on black. But I'm not a conformist. I chose black pants and a black camisole — with a red leather jacket.

I arrived at the gallery and perused the eclectic collection. No, not the group hanging up, the group hanging out. The crowd milled through the room, feasting their eyes on the hors d'oeuvres, the other people and occasionally on the art.

I strolled over to a corner and viewed a perfect example of pointillism — the style composed with dots. Dots and spots were all over his shirt — where he must have dripped and dribbled a mix of red wine, spinach dip and salmon pâté. Not my taste — I prefer white wine with fish.

Next, I saw a Dali-esque subject. He had a large gold earring in one ear and a silver stud piercing his right eyebrow. One side of his hair was long and green; the other side had a pink buzz cut. Sorry, I've never been into surrealism.

The next one reminded me of

a French Master — he had a beret, a beard and a butt dangling from his lips. Au revoir — I kept moving around the room.

Keep in mind, gallery etiquette requires a special repartee. Joining me in front of a large black impasto painting with charred edges, one man said, "I love his surfaces. He has a real way with his brush."

"Do you know his number?" I asked, "I need my bathroom painted."

Another art aficionado approached. "The theme of this is so powerful — the meaning, the depth, the pain!"

I was thinking, pain reliever — his after-shave was giving me a headache.

Then my eyes lit on the masterpiece I'd been waiting for — with fine texture, strong lines and rich color. (He had a cashmere jacket, a chiseled jaw and a great tan.) I headed toward him and stood in front of the painting he was staring at — a large, dark blue canvas with splotches of chartreuse and orange. I started the conversation.

"Are you thinking of buying it?" I asked.

"Oh, no," he replied, "I already have a collection from Pier 1."

He was funny too. I liked this guy.

He turned to me and smiled, "Do you think the artist was trying to say something?"

"Yes," I answered, "Help me, I'm having a Prozac moment!"

We spent the next hour together, walking around, talking about various other objets d'art. Then, wonder of wonders — he took my number and asked me out for the following night.

Saturday morning when he called, I was thrilled. He said he'd gotten tickets for something really special and we'd also have dinner.

I was so excited. We were probably going to the opera, or the ballet or maybe the Philharmonic. After all, I'd met him at a gallery — he appreciated the finer things in life.

He arrived at 8 and we headed out. It turned out to be an awesome evening and I learned to appreciate the finer things in life: a night spent screaming at a hockey game, scarfing down hot dogs and chugging beer.

Marilyn Anderson is the author of "Never Kiss a Frog: A Girl's Guide to Creatures From the Dating Swamp." She can be contacted at weekend@latimes.com.