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## Paint Nite stirs it up at Baltimore restaurants, bars

Popular new amateur arts classes combine brushes, easels and cocktails

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Artist Caren Shelley (standing at left) leads the class as PaintNite visits Tatu. (Karl Merton Ferron, Baltimore Sun / July 11, 2013)

By Dustin Levy, The Baltimore Sun  
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On a recent Thursday night at Tatu in Power Plant Live, the lights were dim and the crowd lively. But the 50-some patrons didn't come for the stylish Asian cuisine — they wanted to sip cocktails and work on their brush strokes.

The event — Paint Nite — is a weekly gathering held twice a week in Baltimore bars and restaurants. Participants socialize and re-create a piece of art, while servers dodge easels to deliver cocktails. At this particular Paint Nite, the subject was "African Sun," a simple painting of a sunset with the silhouette of a tree. The artists felt comfortable enough to embellish — one woman painted a palm tree while another decorated his tree with a sleeping cat.

"We're light on instruction, more focused on creativity and having a good time," said Chief "Fun" Officer Scott Hakanson. "It's a great new twist on the social scene."

Hakanson's title reflects the breezy atmosphere Paint Nite tries to create. Founded in Boston in March 2012, it has spread to more than 20 cities, mostly on the East Coast, and plans to go international. So far, it's been met with a warm reception in Baltimore: The first two events, held last month, were sold out. It joins a growing number of nontraditional art events in Baltimore, including Super Art Fight, a live painting competition held at the **Ottobar**, and Dr. Sketchy's Anti-Art School, a burlesque-meets-life-drawing session at the Windup Space.

Paint Nite heavily relies on websites like Groupon, Travelzoo and Yipit, as well as social media. Throughout Thursday's event, coordinators snapped photos and uploaded them to the Paint Nite Baltimore Facebook page.

The crowd of 50 consisted mostly of women in their 20s, and almost all of the six men in attendance came with a wife or girlfriend. Hakanson sees Paint Nite as ideal for a girls' night out or date night. It typically lasts about two hours, and participants go home with a 16"x20" canvas of their acrylic painting. Brushes, paint, canvases and, yes, smocks are provided.

Char Townes liked that element of Paint Nite. Dragged to the event by her friend, Townes was enjoying herself, explaining that she liked "doing something different."

Caren Shelley, a local artist and art teacher, served as the instructor for the night, and was easily the most enthusiastic person in the room. As Shelley walked around the room, she held up the easels of the participants, encouraging their creativity.

At one point, Shelley held up a couple's paintings with a large sun that connected when the canvases were placed side-by-side. The room collectively "aww"ed.

Kristan Lawler, 26, and her boyfriend, 28-year-old Zach Grisav, recently moved to Baltimore and were looking for something new to do on a weeknight when Lawler happened upon a Groupon for Paint Nite.

## Related



Paint Nite Baltimore at Tatu [Pictures]



Super Art Fight [Pictures]



Dr. Sketchy's Anti-Art School Baltimore [Pictures]

- Dr. Sketchy's offers drawing sessions in burlesque settings

"I like the atmosphere," said Lawler, adding that she would "definitely" come to Paint Nite again. Lawler conceded that coming to Paint Nite was her idea, not Grisar's.

"It's a fun change of pace — something different," Grisar said.

If you go

The next Paint Nites are 7 p.m. Tuesday at Alonso's, 415 W. Cold Spring Lane, and 7 p.m. Thursday at Tatu, 614 Water St. Tickets, which include painting supplies, are \$45. For more information, go to [paintnite.com](http://paintnite.com).

More events

Paint Nite isn't the only alternative art event in Baltimore. These other events take art into nontraditional settings.

**Super Art Fight**, the self-declared greatest live art competition in the known universe, is a traveling, improvised, high-energy live art competition founded in Baltimore. The show features bouts between artists who are given a time limit and a topic to work with. As the bouts draw closer to the end, the art competition adopts a professional wrestling feel. Artists are given the opportunity to "attack" their competitor's work and are afforded the ability to "tag team" their canvas by bringing in a helping hand to hash out the final product.

The next Super Art Fight is Aug. 9 at the Baltimore Convention Center, 1 W. Pratt St., during Otakon. Go to [superartfight.com](http://superartfight.com).

A semi-risque, booze-filled good time, **Dr. Sketchy's Anti-Art School** is an opportunity for Baltimoreans to sketch a variety of burlesque beauties. The live model drawing sessions feature a grab bag of models, from trapeze artists, to drag queens, to roller derby girls. Just remember to tip the models when they're done and please, please, don't be creepy.

The next Dr. Sketchy's session is Aug. 12 at The Windup Space, 12 W. North Ave. Go to [drsketchysbaltimore.com](http://drsketchysbaltimore.com).

—*Adam Gutekunst*

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