

For him, painting is a performance art

There are plenty of logistics to consider when an artist decides to paint a 5-by-30-foot swatch of silk, which has been draped from the exposed metal ceiling beams of Clyde Iron Works.

By: **Christa Lawler**, Duluth News Tribune

- [Lee Zimmerman](#)



Lee Zimmerman paints a flower scene on a silk canvas in January. He will paint a 5-by-30-foot length of silk for a benefit event at Clyde Iron Works in October, with a practice session set for tonight. (2010 file / News Tribune)

There are plenty of logistics to consider when an artist decides to paint a 5-by-30-foot swatch of silk, which has been draped from the exposed metal ceiling beams of Clyde Iron Works.

What sort of contraption will allow a painter to move vertically from top to bottom?
Where will the artist put his brushes and paint?

What keeps an artist from spinning and swaying, not to mention colliding with the piece?

Painter Lee Zimmerman has already addressed these issues: block and tackle, like the climbers use — with help from Vertical Endeavors; a Velcro vest; people manning his movement from beneath him.

But to iron out unforeseen hiccups, Zimmerman will be doing a test run of the public painting performance at 7 p.m. today at Clyde Iron Works. The public is invited to stop in and check it out.

Zimmerman is preparing for “Brave: An event to celebrate 30 years of the Duluth Model and the safety of women all over the world, a fundraiser for Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs,” which starts at 6 p.m. Oct. 23 at Clyde.

“All these complexities melt away in my brain when I think about doing the painting,” Zimmerman said. “I think we can do something that begins to touch on the sublime. The fact that I’m up there ... it’s secondary to the process.”

“I should be totally scared or nuts or worried about it. Every time I think of being at the

top, it drains away. What a luscious opportunity to paint this silk and all in a line.”

The event will feature Zimmerman doing his trademark silk painting, most recently seen in the Duluth Playhouse’s production of “The Secret Garden,” where he created an original backdrop on a collection of panels during every night of the performance.

But this is the X-Games edition: He will be suspended in a harness, and seated on a small bench with buckets hanging off the sides. The silk will hang separately, with him painting from behind it so just the colors are revealed to the audience.

Cello player Kathy McTavish will play as he works, and poet Sheila Packa is headlining a mix of local poets to tell stories. Zimmerman’s painting will be sliced into five pieces, and turned into quilts by Karen McTavish, which are up for auction at www.braveevent.blogspot.com.

“I need to make something that holds together as a single image, but can be broken into five standalone images, and wants to blend in with the stories being told,” Zimmerman said. “I think I’m getting close.”

Linda Riddle, the executive director of Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs, said the artists approached her about contributing to a fundraiser for the organization.

“I was thrilled,” she said.

Art-based awareness has been a theme for the Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs in previous Octobers, which is Domestic Abuse Awareness Month. Last year they hosted the State Art Board’s “Art of Recovery” exhibition.

“This year is a spectacular art event,” Riddle said. “(It has) all of the elements of really celebrating women in a huge way. Something that is both powerful and beautiful. Having original art performed in front of an audience is going to be outstanding. It’s very much the event you aren’t going to want to miss.”

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