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Public Art at the Polls

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Suffragium. Still from the video by Jill Sebastian

Where did the presidential election and performance art cross paths? No, not

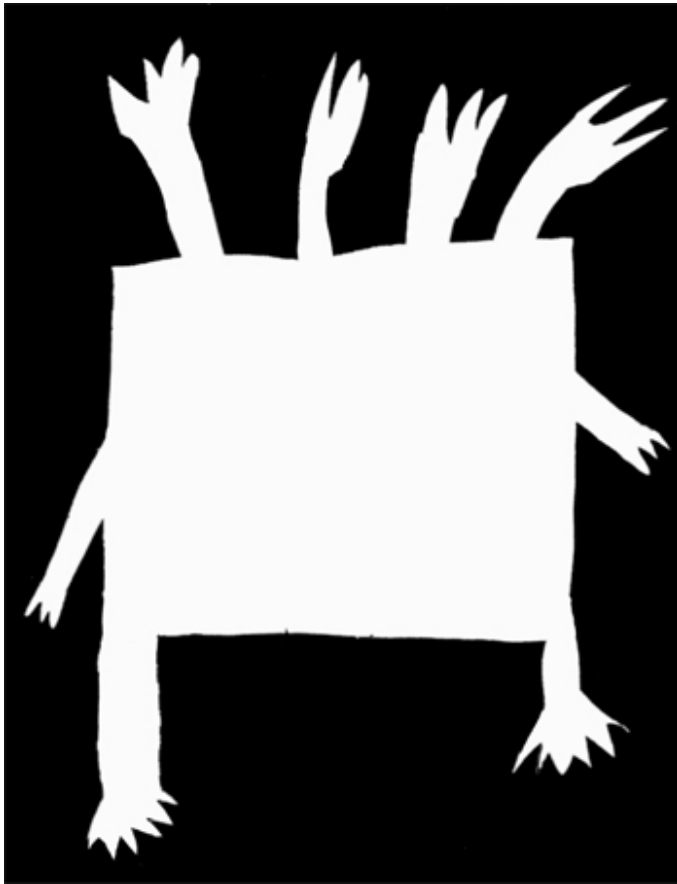
LA or New York...try MILWAUKEE!!



For the first time in US history, voters were treated to performance art at polling places. Voters at 11 sites in Milwaukee experienced dance, video, recorded sound, sculpture, and more, all with the purpose of celebrating and encouraging discussion about citizenship. A non-profit, nonpartisan group called My Vote Performs (MVP) produced the project.

For *Suffragium* (above), Jill Sebastian used documentation from the Milwaukee Public Library, the site of her project, and images of sculptures that are in and in front of the voting area at the library to create an animated video about Wisconsin's voting history. The video was presented on two TV monitors inside the library for voters to watch while waiting in line, and there was also a woman in period costume outside the library singing suffragist songs.

As part of his project, *Amalgam* (a portion of which is illustrated below), at Craig Montessori School, Steve Wetzel distributed a form to 4th-grade students requesting that they sketch their ideal voting booth. The sketches were incorporated into a two-dimensional amalgam, made by Wetzel, that was on display in the school lobby.



Co-producers Pegi Taylor and John Loscuito needed to get approval at multiple stages of the project from the state and local elections divisions, as well as from all the site managers. The delicate balance was making sure the art was nonpartisan and would not interfere with people voting, yet offer artists opportunities to do their best work.

MVP was a success. Hundreds of people were exposed to performance art. Voting site officials were cooperative. No one complained that the art was partisan. A complete list of participating performers and projects, along with key media coverage, can be viewed at

<http://www.myvoteperforms.com/>

MVP's key sponsor, the Wisconsin Arts Board, gave funding hoping the project could serve as a model for other cities. If you are interested in learning more, My Vote Performs will present a documentary video at the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design, 273 E. Erie Street in Milwaukee, Nov. 25 at 7:00 p. m. Or feel free to contact co-producer Pegi Taylor at pegitay@sbcglobal.net

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