

Chicago Tribune

A&E

Ready, aim—fire the goopy tomatoes

October 02, 2006 By FROM NEWS SERVICES

A barrage of tomato missiles slammed into Jonathan Kinkley on Sunday afternoon, covering him with pulp and seeds.

But the 26-year-old art history graduate student at the University of Illinois at Chicago wasn't upset about the hit. Instead, after a quick chuckle, he scooped up a large wad of slimy tomatoes and aimed right back.

Kinkley and nine others threw more than 3,000 pounds of stewed tomatoes at each other for an art performance coordinated by Chicago artist Jeanne Dunning. The fighters tossed the red fruit and frolicked on a makeshift white stage for an audience on a grassy field near UIC.

The performance, part of a series called , held by the university's College of Architecture and the Art's Gallery 400, drew dozens of spectators, including families, students and puzzled passers-by.

The inspiration for Dunning's tomato fight came from a festival in Bunol, Spain called "La Tomatina," where each year thousands of people engage in tomato combat.

"They cart in truckloads of slightly rotten tomatoes, and it's just a free-fall of tomato throwing," Dunning said.

Chicago isn't the first American city to experience the tomato battle. A professor of art theory and practice at Northwestern University, Dunning, 45, actually staged her first tomato fight in San Francisco while doing a residency at the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts.

The first fight "was so interesting and so beautiful that I thought, I should have invited an audience to see this," she said.

Giggles and squeals erupted Sunday from the stage as tomatoes flew. The fighters leapt and slid, turning the white walls and tan carpet into a red battlefield.

"It was wet and wild, exhausting and disgusting--but strangely beautiful," Kinkley said. "I've seen and heard of 'La Tomatina' and got to experience it firsthand."