

photo by
[alexa meade](#)

radar: [alexa meade](#)

Painted lady

artist [alexa meade](#) would like you to be her canvas. by [tandice ossareh](#)



LIKE EVERY MORNING should, the one I spend with Washington, D.C.-based artist Alexa Meade begins with body paint. The 23-year-old—she was a press staffer for the Obama campaign—is an overnight art sensation, practicing a trompe l’oeil painting technique in which she paints people’s portraits directly onto their bodies and photographs them in a way that makes the resulting image appear two-dimensional. After her first show at Postmasters in New York City last April, Meade signed on with Irvine Contemporary, a gallery in D.C. the next month and has since shown internationally. Today, she has agreed to paint me for *NYLON* so I can experience her technique first hand.

“One thing I’m exploring in my work is this tension between permanent and impermanent—the ephemeral,” says Meade, glancing down at her paint-splattered pants. “The painting only lasts for a couple hours, and the person goes on living.”

With that, Meade pulls out her paints, made up of 13 top-secret ingredients, and gets to work on my arms, face, and shirt.

It feels really ticklish and wonderful at first. I sit there thinking, People should do this all the time! Paint parties every day! Of course, as it slowly dries, I lose mobility in my face and start to gain sympathy for those Buckingham Palace guards. Four hours later, Meade is finished and puts a mirror in front of me, prompting something of an out-of-body experience. If I sit perfectly still, even / think I’m a painting.

Does it ever freak her out to stare at paint-covered people with their mouths agape for hours at a time? Not until she starts peeling the paint off, she says. And I can see why. After we finish removing the layers, I am holding what is essentially a mask of my own face in my hands. It looks kind of like skin, and I’m feeling a little Buffalo Bill-meets-Botticelli. When it’s all finally off—OK, I admit it, I kept one arm painted for the day—I ask Meade where she wants to go from here. “I want to paint an entire landscape, paint on the grass and the trees,” she says. “I’ve worked out a way with biodegradable paints where I think I can do it.” Judging from how far and fast she’s come in the past year, Mother Nature should get ready for her close-up now.

above photographed by [julien isaacs](#).

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