

Scene Last Night: Graffiti at Trippy Whitney Farewell

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Raymond McGuire, global head of investment banking at Citigroup Inc., in the Whitney's Breuer building lobby. McGuire said he has been a trustee of the museum for more than 20 years. Photographer: Amanda Gordon/Bloomberg

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Nov. 20 (Bloomberg) -- A record \$4.3 million was the haul last night at the Whitney Museum of American Art's annual gala, a \$1.6 million increase over last year.

Co-chairman Brooke Garber Neidich announced the figure during dinner on the museum's third floor, where every wall had been filled, by hand, with the names of artists in the permanent collection -- a way of leaving a mark on the Marcel Breuer building before the Whitney moves to larger digs in the Meatpacking District.

Director Adam Weinberg said the Renzo Piano-designed downtown museum, a \$750 million project, will open on May 1, 2015 -- "it's a palindrome," he said: "5115."

First to hear it were 600 seated guests including Raymond McGuire, global head of investment banking at Citigroup; J. Michael Evans, the former Goldman Sachs vice-chairman who's on the board of Alibaba; Rob Speyer, co-chief executive of Tishman Speyer; Lenard Tessler of Cerberus

Capital; and Darius Bikoff, who made his fortune in Vitaminwater and the like.

These men were gala co-chairmen with their wives, and received thanks at the lectern, along with supporter Louis Vuitton.

Who the Whitney really wanted to celebrate was graffiti'd on the walls -- and the room's columns and paper lanterns suspended over tables: the artists. Many were present, including Fred Wilson, Jeff Koons, Chuck Close, Brice Marden and Tom Sachs. Cindy Sherman had one of the best seats in the house for Elvis Costello, who sang "only hits" at the museum's request, including "Everyday I Write the Book" and "Alison."

Award Winners

Ninety-seven artists were listed as honorees in the program for having solo exhibitions or receiving the Bucksbaum Award. Among them, and seated next to one another, were Lawrence Weiner, who in 2007 covered the Whitney's walls with typographic works like "Before & After A Hole in Time," and architect Liz Diller, who had an exhibition of "Aberrant Architecture" in 2003.

Together, they mused on Breuer's building, whose next occupant (a tenant of the Whitney) will be the Metropolitan Museum of Art, using the space as a satellite to its own headquarters.

"It's very strange to see the building without art in it," Diller said, pausing to look up at the open grid below the room's true ceiling. "If you look through the coffer, you see the structure, the mechanicals. I think this is Breuer's best work, actually."

Jain, Phelan

"Making my show here, the building was not my adversary at all," Weiner said, just before waiters wielding scissors descended to cut the parchment enveloping their branzino.

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Art dealers, publishing executives, and financiers filled the room. Among the latter were Robert Jain, head of alternative investments at Credit Suisse, Robert Soros, Adebayo Ogunlesi, John Angelo, David Ganek, founder of Apocalypse 22, and MSD Capital's John Phelan and Glenn Fuhrman.

Some of the women assembled recalled visiting the museum while single, dating, pregnant and with their children, now grown up and attending the gala too.

Jack Shear, the head of the Ellsworth Kelly Foundation, noted how warmly greeted he has always been by the museum's guards.

Bikoff said one of his best memories of the building is "touching a Jackson Pollock and not getting busted."

Mobile Desserts

Asked if he'd be taking any part of the building with him, Weinberg, the museum's director, replied, "just the memories -- and the idea of the malleability of the museum: the idea that you can use the building for raw material for art making. The museum is a place for making art, not just showing art."

"I'm very excited about the new building and I think Adam is an incredible leader," said Fiona Donovan, the great-granddaughter of museum founder Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney.

Donovan, an art historian, recently rejoined the Whitney's board after a long absence. "It's been an extremely festive evening," she said, before chatting with Padma Lakshmi and Carter Foster, a curator of drawing at the Whitney.

At the after-party on the fourth floor, extension cords formed the phrase "Goodbye for now" above the bar, while a time-lapse video taken from the roof of the new building showed the water and sky views unlikely to ever be available from the current space in the heart of the Upper East Side.

Artist Will Pappenheimer gave the dinner guests and a fresh set of younger patrons a chance to see their environs in a new way. All it took was downloading the Layar application, scanning a QR code, and holding up a mobile phone or tablet.

Proxy Tripping

Then, the view using the camera function included spinning flowers, tunnels made of stripes in psychedelic colors, and other visual effects, all juxtaposed with what was actually taking place as the clock approached and then passed midnight: guests dancing, or checking out a wall of archival photographs, including one of Jackie Kennedy at the 1967 opening of the building, or lining up at a dessert station housed in a big moving crate.

Christiane Paul, the museum's adjunct curator of new media arts, roamed the space with her iPad, documenting the project.

Pappenheimer designed his augmented-reality application, called "Proxy, 5-WM2A," to resemble the experience of taking a dissociative drug.

"This is the moment when we have to detach," he said.

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