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PARTIES » AFTER HOURS » PARTIES » THE BROOKLYN ARTISTS BALL



The Brooklyn Artists Ball

Apr 2011 | by [Vanessa Lawrence](#)

The Brooklyn Museum

A man wearing a full-on vintage military coat with epaulets. A woman sporting Tippi Hedren hair, post bird-attack. Waiters bearing silver trays with wine-sized bottles of artisanal beer served in frosted glasses.

Partygoers, I wasn't in Manhattan.

In fact, I was in Brooklyn, specifically at the Brooklyn Museum for its Brooklyn Artists Ball. And if that wasn't enough Brooklyn for you, the

beer in question was Brooklyn Brewery, with a label designed by Fred Tomaselli, one of the three artists being honored that night.

Things started early yesterday evening, with cocktails in the Beaux-Arts building's ground floor Great Hall where the Situ Studio's installation "reorder: An Architectural Environment" was on display—fabric canopies shaped like a cross between a classical column and a Noguchi lamp with seating at the bottom—all lit by the video art of Sean Capone.

Honorary Chair Sarah Jessica Parker—who was only making a brief appearance before rushing to cheer on friends in the opening night of "The Normal Heart" on Broadway—graciously posed for pictures with guests and fans.

"I tried to dress appropriately for this important event: I didn't want to embarrass the museum and I certainly didn't want to embarrass my friend," she explained of her double-duty outfit, a mélange of navy satin Manolos, a metallic Lanvin dress and a tweed Chanel jacket (umm, little chance of that). Parker's commitment to the museum stemmed from its support of her Bravo show "Work of Art": last season the winner showed in one its galleries. She had also spent the past few months shooting in Brooklyn, but "This is my first cultural distraction here in a while," she said.

That seemed to be the case for others in the crowd, which included Gossip Girl actor Matthew Settle, Eileen Guggenheim, Cynthia Rowley, Hannah Bronfman, Vito Schnabel and Yvonne Force Villareal.

Said one guest, "I haven't been to Brooklyn in ten years, oh wait, I was here last summer at the River Café for a Cinema Society event."

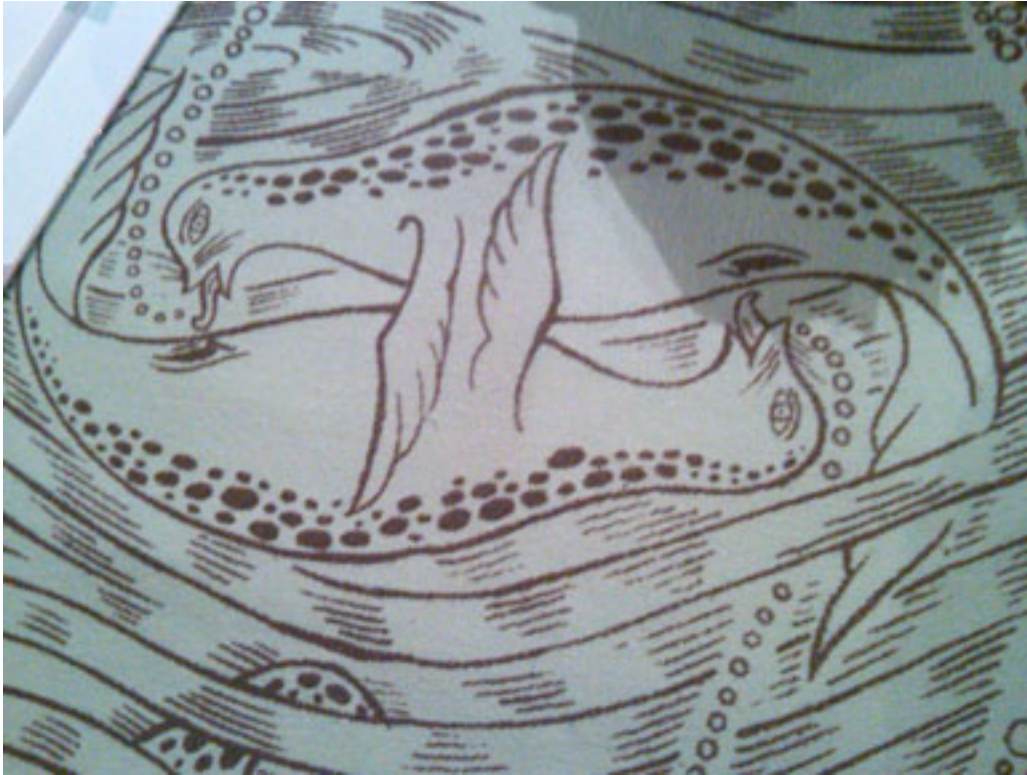
Yes, the borough does get the short end of the stick sometimes, though last night proved quite the rally to suggest otherwise.

"A lot of my friends live here," offered Honorary Chair Liv Tyler, as her rumored beau Theo Wenner grinned from a distance.

“I was born in Brooklyn, I live near the neighborhood where I grew up, so I’m very provincial,” said artist Lorna Simpson, one of the night’s honorees. “Manhattan usually gets first preference but there are other boroughs with other things going on...Some New Yorkers prefer not to leave the island of Manhattan.”

Those who made the trip were certainly rewarded by the dinner scene that greeted them on the museum’s third floor. Sixteen emerging Brooklyn artists had been asked to design a table and the results ranged from tongue-in-cheek to provocative. Aleksander Duravcevic’s creation included a taxidermy ram centerpiece, surrounded by fake ice cubes with flowers in them; Justin Cooper’s sprouted garden hoses in lieu of candelabras, and Dustin Yellin’s had a full line of his signature, glowing resin-like boxes containing cloud and fossil-esque objets.

I have to admit, when I first sat down at Duke Riley’s table, I was a bit disappointed. Seashells, dusty multi-colored glass bottles and a skeleton were scattered about the surface. Pretty enough (and that skeleton, creepy), but it didn’t seem to have the drama of some other endeavors. That was until partway through the steak meal, my seatmate Carly Cushnie pointed out the tablecloth to me.



The

tablecloth in question

“Did you notice the 69-ing seals?” she inquired as though we were talking about the weather.

Umm, no, I hadn’t.

“It’s like Where’s Waldo!” laughed her design partner, Michelle Ochs. Indeed, Riley had made a silk-screened tablecloth inspired by 19th century wallpaper and the harbor seals that gather around Swinburne Island to mate in the month of April. Translation? A celadon colored piece of fabric covered in all manner of seal couples—male on male, female on male, female on female—surrounded by the detritus of their activities (cell phones and condoms). I think my table may have won for most subtly imaginative—and subversively charming.

After that, it seemed the right time to descend back down to the Great Hall where Timo Weiland, Alan Eckstein, Butthole Surfers’ Gibby Haynes and Matt Creed took their turns deejaying an after party for a crowd of Converse and skinny jeans-clad guys and girls in digital print dresses.

