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SCENE & HERD

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 David Velasco on the opening of "The Quick and the Dead" at the Walker
 Claudia La Rocco at Movement Research's spring festival
 Linda Yablonsky around MACO in Mexico City
 Kate Sutton on Damien Hirst at the PinchukArtCentre in Kiev
 Lauren O'Neill-Butler at a benefit for Participant Inc.

Due East

NEW YORK 04.24.09



Left: Artists Kathe Burkhart and John Lovett. Right: Artist Kembra Pfahler. (All photos: Ryan McNamara)

"I **AM PARTICIPANT**," exclaimed artist Kathe Burkhart as we navigated the expanding crowd, a few hundred strong, at the nonprofit's annual benefit on Sunday. "Well, really *Lia* is," she finally allowed, giving credit to the institution's founding director, Lia Gangitano. Burkhart gestured across the room toward the announcement card for her 2003 solo show, and I skimmed the crowd, spotting other artists who might also "be" Participant. The card, as well as some works by those artists, was amid a makeshift time line that stretched across one of the black-painted walls: the institution's exhibition history in a rainbow-colored row. One of Burkhart's works drew attention from passersby and underscored the playful pitch of the night—**FUCK THE UNDERGROUND** it declares, in bold scarlet type over a picture of a cemetery.

Around 7 PM, the crowd began to hush and push toward the rear of the space as the deathly Kembra Pfahler, lead singer of the Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black, took to a small stage, without her band. "I'm a little nervous," she admitted. Sporting her signature ghastly look—complete with a white bow drowning in the large tussle of her wig—Pfahler seemed perfectly posed once the music started, and she belted out a pop-punk song, "Actresstocracy," karaoke-style. Afterward, she bantered with the audience like any good rock star, remarking, "Today is the first day of the rapture, or the 'new depression,' according to Lia," to raucous cheers.

Parked to the left of the platform, Gangitano stood surrounded by artists she's worked with for years, including Charles Atlas, Lovett/Codagnone, Laura Parnes, and Burkhart. As the band *Beaut* took the stage, its lovely front woman, Marti Domination—sporting a look halfway between Tammy Faye Bakker and Tammy Wynette—cooly observed, "I love this gallery, they let us do anything," and lit a cigarette before starting the three-song set.



Left: Participant director Lia Gangitano and White Columns director Matthew Higgs. Right: Performer Marti Wilkerson (Marti Domination) with artist Charles Atlas.

The \$150 ticket didn't seem to deter too many people from attending the reception, but the \$500 donation for dinner wasn't everyone's speed. Post-*Beaut*, artist Carrie Moyer noted that she was there



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Galerie

Ai Weiwei to Fill Void Left
by Little Mermaid

“for the part with the young artists, curators, and writers.” To be sure, there were many of those, eager to help out an organization that’s fostered countless careers through solo shows, book launches, readings, film screenings—and let’s not forget the inimitable artist-curated group exhibitions (with “Blow Both of Us,” organized by Shannon Ebner and Adam Putnam in 2007, being a standout in my mind).

At 9 PM, as the crowd began to thin, a few hangers-on sipped one last drink (Hornitos tequila or an Izze soda?) from the open bar. I chatted with Robert Boyd about “Xanadu,” his own show at the gallery, as a fraction of us began to make our way toward dinner at East Village stand-by Lucien. When people dawdled, 303 Gallery’s Mari Spirito spearheaded the move, while Gangitano teased, “Some of you bitches need to eat tonight.”

Over the French fare, I talked with artists Ellen Cantor and John Bratten, while dealer Elizabeth Dee spoke with collectors Barbara and Howard Morse. Everyone seemed to have a story to tell. Digging in, Bratten warmly shared his spotty history of the gallery and noted that even our friendly waiter, artist Brandon Olson, had performed at the space. “Lia lets us do things that commercial galleries won’t,” he said. Cantor nodded, adding, “She makes progress happen.”

— Lauren O’Neill-Butler

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Left: Artists A. L. Steiner, Ryan Harman, and Justine Kurland. Right: Artists Laura Parnes and Derrick Adams.



Left: Dealer Elizabeth Dee with collectors Barbara and Howard Morse. Right: 303 Gallery’s Mari Spirito and Simone Montemurno.



Left: Artist Tabboo! with Lia Gangitano and performer Mr. Twinkle (Paul Arfield). Right: Artists Sheila Pepe and Carrie Moyer.



Left: Team Gallery's Miriam Katzeff and P.S. 1's Kate McNamara. Right: Artist Thomas Lawson (center) and Gladstone Gallery director Rosalie Benitez.



Left: Artist Jacqueline Humphries. Right: Marti Domination.



Left: Artist Alessandro Codagnone with Francesca Gangitano. Right: Fashion designer Andrew Harmon, Tara Young, and Louis Terline.

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