

Los Angeles Times

Fantastical art and fashion about at LAXART Ball

The plate-breaking clowns in the kitchen, the cricket concert in the conservatory, and the party ball (literally) of performance artists on the patio were just a few of the incredible delights to be savored Saturday night at the LAXART Ball of Artists at Beverly Hills' historic Greystone Mansion.

The event was a smash hit, following a long list of smash hits in L.A. this season, beginning in November with the Museum of Contemporary Art's gala of human centerpieces, conceived by performance artist Marina Abramovic. (Would hate to be a party planner in this town -- the bar has been set unreasonably high.)

Organized by LAXART, a nonprofit community arts space, in partnership with the Getty Research Institute, the Ball of Artists included some 20 artists and site-specific performances throughout the 1926 Tudor-style mansion and surrounding grounds, and was billed as the concluding celebration of the citywide Pacific Standard Time: Performance and Public Art Festival.

Of course, the performance artists were far from the only eye-catching inhabitants of the mansion Saturday night, with attendees turning out in all manner of fantastical finery.

The men were dressed all along the spectrum (and some even in the whole spectrum), from bare feet to kilts to black tie. One fellow turned up in bright red Nike athletic shorts and a button-front dress shirt festooned with the club, spade, diamond and heart symbols from a deck of playing cards (which we interpret as sporting a different kind of "suit"). We crossed paths with David Morehouse, who was decked out in a colorful tunic accessorized with a giant Karl Lagerfeld frog lapel pin, and caught up with Decades co-owner Cameron Silver, who materialized out of the fog-machine mists in front of us, having taken barely enough time out of his globe-trotting schedule to alight and delight us with the news that his suit -- a riot of color and pattern -- was actually the first men's offering from hot London designer

Mary Katrantzou. (By accessorizing the outfit with a peacock feather butterfly-shaped bow tie by Alex Mabille and Christian Louboutin "Havana trash" shoes, Silver practically qualified as a party ball all by his lonesome.)

The women were in gowns mostly, but sporting plenty of color and some fun headgear, including a vintage hat that one chic partygoer let on she'd picked up for \$3 at a thrift store in Alabama.

Several people stopped to pose for photos in the motor court against what from afar looked like giant paramecia floating in petri dishes, but upon closer examination turned out to be large blocks of ice, each with half a dozen hothouse cucumbers frozen inside. It was a visual pun with an eye on the long game -- anyone who understood what they were looking at is likely to have the scene top-of-mind for the next decade anytime someone utters the phrase "cool as a cucumber."

Tschorn, Adam, "Fantastical art and fashion abound at LAXART Ball," *Los Angeles Times*, January 30, 2012

Los Angeles fashion designer Corey Lynn Calter tipped us off to a clandestine poker game being staged somewhere in the upper reaches of a tower in the mansion by her husband, artist Glenn Kaino (his latest show, "Bring Me the Hands of Piri Reis," is at Honor Fraser through Feb. 18) and Derek Delgaudio.

We were curious to check out this poker-game-as-performance-art but, lacking the appropriate credentials (a lapel button emblazoned with the words "I Am Not a Bandit"), we were not allowed past the velvet rope at the top of the circular staircase. Then again, the title of the work listed in the program was "The Nothing Happening," so it's likely the guy at the velvet rope at the top of the staircase was the sum and substance of the piece. We'd also heard tell of a secret Zebra Room that required another special button to enter, but alas, we hadn't earned our stripes.

Among the mind-bending scenes playing out were Kathryn Andrews' "Fork Hunt," which consisted of the aforementioned kitchen clowns (performers Robert Baxt and Mark Paskell) pacing about the mansion's kitchen with stacks of dinner plates, alternately spinning them on sticks, smashing them loudly on the black-and-white checkerboard floor and then sweeping them into shard piles. Due to the possibility of flying plate pieces, audience had to sign a liability waiver before stepping forward, a requirement which seemed only to add to the intrigue and appreciation of the crowd. ("Maybe they're Greek clowns," suggested one fellow, presumably referring to that country's plate-smashing custom.)

Mungo Thomson's "Crickets" drew a standing-room-only crowd. The 15-minute orchestral performance, composed and conducted by Michael Webster, was transcribed from the field recordings of crickets with the origins exhaustively noted in the program. "Cameroon, near Douala, June 1971, night in the savana (0:33)" was the description for one piece; "France, Bugey, at night in mid August. European Tree-cricket. This cricket sings from July to October, exclusively at night. (1:22)" read another.

At the conclusion of the performance, the formally dressed orchestra of 12 violinists, two flutists, a clarinetist and two percussionists -- conducted by Webster, dressed in a cutaway tailcoat -- went so suddenly and utterly silent that one immediately expected to hear the awkward punctuation of chirping crickets. And it was in those scant few seconds -- after the music and before the applause -- that "Crickets" achieved a kind of singular comic brilliance.

Like everything else at the Greystone Mansion that evening, the delicious joke was on us -- and for us. And no matter what was happening in the room, it was a sure bet the audience was eating it up -- one broken plate full at a time.