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LAXArt gala serves up typing, tattoos and smashing taboos



Tim Youd's performance piece "Retyping Upton Sinclair's Oil! on an Underwood #5" was among the 30 artworks, performances and interventions on display at the first biannual LAXArt benefit gala at Greystone Mansion in Beverly Hills on Saturday. (Stefanie Keenan / WireImage)

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It's rare in Hollywood for an event – any event – to outshine its celebrity attendees, but that's exactly what happened Saturday night at the LAXArt benefit gala at Greystone Mansion in Beverly Hills, where the art started in the driveway with a hulking Hummer sporting a cast bronze flat tire (Ry Rocklen's "Untitled Hummer Flat") and spilled out onto the hillside patio where Lisa Williamson's towering wooden sculpture (think minimalist totem pole) "Eleven Holes" was framed against the cityscape below.

In between, every kind of artwork and performance you might imagine (as well as a few you never would have) filled every possible room, corner and cubbyhole in the rambling mansion.

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In the ladies room just off the entry foyer three towel-clad women in front of vanity mirrors took turns running brushes and flatirons jacked into Fender Twin Reverb Amps through their hair, resulting in a curious, almost baleful, mix of static and feedback that was Molly Surno's installation and performance. For "We of Me," at the end of one hall, blindfolded attendees were escorted one by one into a completely darkened room where a dancer in 19th-century formal attire would whirl and twirl them blindly – literally – in Liz Glynn's "Waltz No. 9 (Blindness)." Tucked into an alcove off the opposite hallway was Tim Youd, who was clickety-clacking away at an antique typewriter with great gusto as part of his performance piece "Retyping Upton Sinclair's Oil! on an Underwood #5" (a performance that will continue until completion, according to the notes in the checklist of works).

In the arrival court, artist Mattia Biagi challenged deep-rooted superstitions with a four-part interactive installation that had attendees spilling from a garbage bag full of salt, walking beneath three glitter-covered stepladders, stepping on gilded cracks in a patch of cobblestone and finally picking up a tack hammer and smashing a mirrored panel in a large rectangular box. Called "There is nothing to fear Than Fear itself," the artist told us the goal was to "empower people and free them from superstition." As proof of that empowerment, those who completed all four superstition-bashing exercises received a medallion on a black grosgrain ribbon to hang around their neck).

The artworks that weren't performances or interventions included large pieces like Galia Linn's abstract glazed stoneware "Vessels" in the motor court and Adam Mars' subversive/creepy/cool business cards scattered in stacks throughout the mansion (including the restrooms) that contained words such as "We've all seen you naked" and "I loved you then I Googled you" ("Model / Actor / Art Project").

Don't get us wrong, there were plenty of notable names on hand. Over the course of the evening -- when we weren't mesmerized by the art -- we spotted actors Zoe Saldana, Busy Philipps, Molly Shannon, Danny Huston and Jack Huston (who is about to star in a remake of "Ben-Hur," by the way) and fashion folk Irene Neuwirth, Amber Sakai and Scott Sternberg -- the latter of whom we ran into in the pantry, where artist Matt Merkel Hess' "Untitled (Me)" – dozens of loaves of bread baked into pans made from a mold of his face -- was being sliced up and served with butter and jam.

This was the organization's first of a planned biannual gala (some may recall a very similar LAXArt event -- the 2012 Ball of Artists -- which also took place at Greystone), and given the array of awe-inspiring artwork and performances on

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hand at this one, we expect future installments to become one of the art community's must-attend events.

Perhaps the most intriguing of the interventions was Joel Kyack's "The Dirty Poke Ain't No Joke," described in the checklist of works as "performance, continuous," which was essentially the artist dispensing honest-to-goodness tattoos in the billiards room of the mansion, a pool cue's distance away from the bowling alley where a key murder scene in "There Will Be Blood" was filmed. No joke indeed, by about halfway through the three-hour gala, three partygoers would be leaving with brand-new tattoos.

A future conversation starter to end all conversation starters to be sure, but people needn't have had their body inked to have the first biannual LAXArt benefit gala leave an indelible impression.