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MoCA throws a Gala Gala and raises \$554,000

By Hunter Drohojowska

What if you gave a party and everybody wanted to come? That was the dilemma faced by the Museum of Contemporary Art. After 600 tickets, at \$250 per person, were sold for its Gala Gala last Friday night, yet another 400 checks arrived. More tables were added, more shrimp and lamb chops ordered. But still more checks came; finally, more than 200 potential supporters had to be turned away. The activity led William Kieschnick, retired Arco honcho and MoCA's board chairman, to enthuse, "It is exciting to give a party and have more people want to come than you can accommodate."

This was one benefit that offered more than thank-yous to those who subscribed. With Douglas Cramer as "executive producer," Lynda Palevsky and Jane Nathanson as co-chairs of the party, and Margo Leavin and Marcia Ross as co-chairs of the benefit auction, the evening offered plentiful attractions and brought out the likes of Michael and Jane Eisner, Michael Ovit, Shirlee Fonda, Victor Palmieri and Sen. Alan Cranston. The cocktail party and dinner, catered deliciously by the ubiquitous Rococo, were staged in MoCA's new Arata Isozaki-designed building on Grand Avenue.

For many, it was the first view of the elegant galleries, whose ceilings soar upward in the shape of pyramids topped with skylights. In keeping with the architecture, the ambiance was kept surprisingly spare. Tables were set luxuriously apart and were adorned simply with bamboo and white agapanthus, shaded by the occasional potted tree. (A fire



Anne Knudsen/Herald photographer

Douglas Cramer, Gala Gala's "executive producer," attended the dinner and auction with Ames Cushing.

marshal didn't approve of the trees, saying the museum's floors would never hold their weight. MoCA director Richard Koshalek said, "We're in big trouble if that's true. What will happen when we bring in the David Smith sculptures?" Last-minute stress tests were made and proved that the floor was built to bear the weight of mastodons.)

The evening's major draw was the benefit auction, gavelled by Sotheby's John Marion. A silent auction at Margo Leavin Gallery and at Gemini Gel already had netted \$112,000. The live auction brought the total net up to \$554,000, nearly double the profits of last year's Gala Gala, which was held on the Love Boat.

Seattle art dealer Linda Ferris remarked that she felt safe making bids because someone was always

sure to outbid her. Indeed, most of the prices were at the top or above the catalog estimates. No one knew whether the bidding was lively because the money was going to MoCA, because of competition among collectors, or because of the open bar at the back of the room.

In a way, it was something of a tax-deductible swap meet. Herb and Norma Fink paid \$5,500 for the Jean Michel Basquiat print donated by Fred Hoffman's New City Editions. The Getty's Harold Williams bid with authority, paying \$11,500 for a Donald Sultan drawing donated by the artist. MoCA's founding board chairman Ely Board beat out George Gradow and Barbi Benton by paying \$4,250 for a work by George Rodart that was donated by Duke Comegys. Broad later won a battle against Laura Lee



Anne Knudsen/Herald photographer

Richard Koshalek, MoCA's director, Margo Leavin, center, and Elizabeth Koshalek inspect one of the paintings that helped raise \$554,000 in funds to benefit MoCA.

Woods by bidding \$27,000 (\$7,000 over estimate) for a John Duff sculpture donated by Blum Helman Gallery. After the fray, Broad wiped the perspiration from his brow and left the auction, saying, "I need a drink."

Margo Leavin paid \$16,000, (\$4,000 above estimate) for a Peter Alexander black velvet painting and \$6,000 for a Bruce Nauman drawing donated by the artist. Phil Gersh snagged a John Baldessari piece for \$6,500 (donated by Leavin) while son David Gersh trounced Marc Nathanson in bidding \$17,000 (\$7,000 above estimate) for an Eric Fischl drawing donated by Mary Boone. Nathanson rallied and grabbed a Rainer Fetting painting

donated by Douglas Cramer for a low \$8,000 in a momentary bit of confusion. (The painting was estimated at \$18,000 to \$22,000.)

Alan Shayne, who was there with Paige Rense, bought a Richard Bosman painting for a reasonable \$2,300. Strong bidding for a Sam Francis woodcut donated by the artist topped at \$17,000 offered by Richard Kayne. Nick Vanoff bought a daffodil drawing by Ellsworth Kelly for his wife, Felisa, and paid \$8,000, "unless I bid myself up to \$8,500." Councilman Joel Wachs bought a set of Andrew Lord ceramics for \$5,500, but gave them as a gift to MoCA. Cramer, there with Ames Cushing, bid through an assistant, and got a painting

donated by James Rosenquist for \$28,000. Bud Yorkin, there with former "St. Elsewhere" star Cynthia Sykes, bought the collage given by Roy Lichtenstein for \$26,000 and said, "You get double your satisfaction. I think it's good for MoCA and I like the art." At the end, an art library was raffled and the winner was David Gersh, which probably made him feel better about the Fischl price. Mace Neufeld won a collection of prints. Everybody strolled off to dinner and dancing to Peter Duchin and his Orchestra and the '50s tunes of the Stepsisters.

Hunter Drohojowska writes regularly about art for the Herald.