

Out There | Mystery Theater

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A performance in the breakfast room by the group My Barbarian. *Stefanie Keenan/WireImage*

What was Saturday's mysterious Ball of Artists in Beverly Hills? It was not a "katamari" of palettes and berets trundling over and subsuming all M.F.A.-holders in its path. The ball, which brought the [Pacific Standard Time Performance and Public Art Festival](#) to a close, was an ephemeral extravaganza produced by the nonprofit space LAXART.

The evening began in shuttle buses that ferried black-tie guests from the Beverly Hills Civic Center to the mansion's majestic arrival court, where a path flanked by Veuve-Clicquot cater-waiters in period garb led to an inscrutable set of twins resembling "Cremaster" extras, Daphne Guinness or some other opulent Anglo-Saxon being. Beyond them, Eamon Ore-Giron's "Purplish Haze" billowed out of the courtyard gates as the first (artist-made) art of the night.

What could have been bedlam unfurled as enchantment. Rumored to be haunted, the mansion indeed was: by uniformed rangers tightly controlling crowds. (The site has been a city park since 1971.) The campfire stories of the fire marshal enforcing an installation's capacity came to life before guests' eyes! But with only 1,000 people allowed on the premises, there was air to breath, to wander and to entirely lose oneself in the parquet maze. To the organizers' credit, the finite guest list prioritized many artists in addition to those who had work there. Walead Beshty, Dawn Kasper, Fritz Haeg, Andrea Longacre-White, Brendan Fowler, Rodney McMillan, Naomi Fisher and Jim Drain, to name a few, helped the ball pass as an art gala for (at least somewhat), rather than just by, artists. One of the only celebrities in sight was Whitney Port, of "The Hills" and "The City," whose enduring onscreen stares may qualify her as a performance artist anyway.

One of the first of the many timed performances was the most memorable. In the living room, Mungo Thompson assembled 12 violinists and a handful of wind and percussion instrumentalists to perform a suite adapted from 20 field recordings of crickets composed and conducted by Michael Webster. The first recital was timed with the sunset: day turned into night through the latticed windows backing the musicians, and a captive audience listened as the rigid notations became figments of nature.

There were no trick bookcases or trap doors, but, yes, there were clandestine rooms, accessible with different buttons. The one that said “I am an Artist” was a good one to have, but not as good as “Soy un Artista,” which granted entry to the basement “There Will Be Blood” bowling alley, where Casa Dragones doled out flutes of its \$250-a-bottle tequila. The artist Eduardo Sarabia conceived the room’s ambience: a photographer shot prom Polaroids before a faux-colonial tableau involving a stuffed zebra, and the Guadalajara-based duo Los Master Plus pumped up the jams for a dance party in the lanes. “I Know a Secret” entitled the wearer to ascend from the tequila party up a turret, atop which the artist Glenn Kainos had procured a croupier to deal cards for an exclusive class of gamblers.

Another form of debauchery transpired on the veranda. A nine-foot orb wrought of garbage bag material, by Eamonn Fox, contained its own party of nearly naked people. Head-size slits in the plastic made partygoers privy to what was happening inside, and it was a feast for the senses, including smell. Beside it, the constant clicking of Julian Hoeber’s shuttering spotlight exchanged Morse code with another light across the city. Elsewhere, replacing the Champagne greeters in the front, Jedediah Caesar and Flora Wiegmann’s re-creation of the Lumière Brothers’ “Danse Serpentine” trained a light on a woman robed in white. As she spun, a light illuminated her costume as it phased through different hues. Clowns breaking dishes, glow-in-the-dark chrysanthemums, cucumbers suspended like Han Solo in a wall of ice — there was no shortage of diversions from an otherwise already engrossing location.

Before the suckling pig sliders were served, remarks were delivered in the courtyard and China Chow was surreptitiously adamant that she stand at a certain spot on the fountain for a certain view of the speakers. Following the obligatory thank yous, in his capacity as master of ceremonies, the artist David Lamelas led a moment of silence in the name of conceptual art’s broad acceptance. A beat later, the synthy start of Corey Hart’s “Sunglasses at Night” came over the P.A. system, cuing Chow and a couple dozen others evenly scattered around the yard to shoot their hands over their heads, drop on their shades and commence a flash mob choreography for the song, engineered by Alex Israel. In that scene, certain shades of the 1980s, the art world, Hollywood and the night itself coalesced — dark, silly and decadent, but also whimsical, wonderful and inspired.