

Brooklyn Museum's Artists Ball & Dance Party 2015: A preview

By Benjamin Preston

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The Brooklyn Museum is holding its fifth annual Brooklyn Artists Ball Wednesday evening, and although many of the same artists featured last year will participate in this year's celebration, the impetus behind the event will be a little different.

First off, the fundraising gala will also fete Arnold Lehman, who has served as the director of the museum since 1997 and is retiring this year. The event will also honor a trio of contemporary artists exemplar: Jean-Michel Basquiat, Takashi Murakami and Kiki Smith. The ball also marks the opening of a special exhibit at the museum entitled "Diverse Works: Director's Choice 1997-2015."

As in previous years, the celebration will include an immersive dinner experience created by the artists featured at the event, including Jen Catron & Paul Outlaw, Faile, Fernando Masrtrangelo, Olek, Duke Riley, Situ Studio, Swoon and Dustin Yellin.

The Brooklyn Eagle dropped in on some of the artists last week to see how preparations for the ball were going. Jen and Paul's studio, near the Brooklyn Navy Yard, was piled high with giant papier-mâché feast items — among them were a pig, a drumstick, a huge piece of cheese and a huge, iridescent fish. A helper sat quietly in a corner, making more papier-mâché props as Jen scurried around attending to everything else. She said the duo had procured a boom lift that will support a large sculpture in the middle of their installation.

"It'll be raining down gifts to the diners below," she said, explaining that the theme for their dining experience is based upon the medieval myth of the land of Cockaigne, a place where food and physical pleasures abound, and where the harshness of peasant life and strictures of religious morality do not exist. The gifts will be participatory, she said, and will relate to the larger feast items, which will be moving around above the diners throughout the event.

"We wanted it to be tongue-in-cheek; something people are really going to enjoy," she said.

Olek was working in a studio situated at the end of a long, bare hallway in an old industrial building a few blocks from the terminus of the Gowanus Canal. Bleak as the outside world may have been on that gray, chilly day, the small room in which she and her helpers were preparing ball decorations was busy with bright colors. Colored rolls of yarn were stacked on shelves along one wall, and Olek's signature crocheted urban camouflage



A giant drumstick that will appear at Jen Catron & Paul Outlaw's dinner on Wednesday. Jen said it would be among a number of oversized feast items moving around above diners.



Jen Catron shows off a giant cheese wedge she and Paul Outlaw plan to include in their section of the Brooklyn Artists Ball.

banners lined the walls, along with portraits of topless women wearing crocheted masks, crochet-covered wine goblets and chandeliers, and other odds and ends.

A pair of actors who will be part of the display sat against a multi-colored wall covering — a shirtless man wearing gold pants and a crocheted elephant mask, and a woman wearing a crocheted mermaid costume.

"I'm going crazy making this happen," Olek said as she darted from one side of the small room to the other. "I have more ideas than I have hands. There are a lot of people working on it, but you always need extra hands."

She said her display will feature two 40-foot-long tables — each covered with crocheted dinnerware and candelabra — and about 10 costumed performers. She said the mermaids that diners will see are linked to her concern over the decline in the whale sharks population, as well as other problems across the wider marine environment.

Faile's piece will be a contrast to the colors of some of the other installations. Patrick Miller said he and Patrick McNeil, who together form Faile, had created a setup that would be cast all in black and white.

"We decided to take inspiration from the light tables we use in our silk-screening process," he said. "That's kind of the core of what we do in the studio."

Faile's section will feature long, white tables with fluorescent tubes inside them. Black and white films similar to the ones they use for silk screening will be layered on top of the lights, and diners will each get a pair of Faile sunglasses.

"Hopefully it won't be too bright," Miller said, adding, "The Brooklyn Artists Ball is a great event, and we're honored to be part of it for a second time."

The festivities kick off with a cocktail party on Wednesday evening at 6 p.m. The art-festooned dinner begins at 8 p.m., and will be followed by a dance party at 10 p.m. The dinner is sold out, but tickets are still available for the dance party.