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The Gimlet Eye

Guy Trebay

The Guests Wore Red



JOSHUA BRIGHT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

COLOR CODED Anne Hathaway at the Red Party for Performa.

“I wasn’t even naked that much,” Anne Hathaway was saying on Saturday, as Cindy Sherman passed the brussels sprouts.

This was at a dinner, a benefit for Performa, the New York nonprofit arts organization that, in the five years since its creation, has sponsored performance art works as ambitious and various as Shirin Neshat’s “Logic of the Birds”; Adam Pendleton’s “The Revival,” a politically skewed rendition of an evangelical revival; and Francesco Vezzoli’s restaging of a Luigi Pirandello obscenity at the Guggenheim Museum, which notably featured Natalie Portman wearing a mustache.

The dinner, called the Red Party, was held in a spacious production facility just off the West Side Highway, transformed for the evening into a fac-

simile of a Russian Constructivist set. In keeping with the theme, many guests, including Ms. Hathaway, came dressed as instructed in shades of cardinal, crimson, scarlet, magenta or else the bright, light red of a Russian flag.

“There’s always that one question,” said Ms. Hathaway, who arrived fresh from a daylong marathon of interviews for her current movie, “Love and Other Drugs.”

She was referring to the kind of canned query journalists on the celebrity beat repeat until their subject’s head threatens to implode. All anyone wanted to know about this time was how it felt to perform naked bedroom gymnastics with Jake

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SOCIAL MASH-UP Alan Cumming, top, master of ceremonies at the Red Party for Performance, above and right. Below, RoseLee Goldberg, the arts group's founder. Bottom, red doors await arriving guests.



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said. "Sometimes you do have to run back to your past, though, and touch it to believe it was real."

You can do so, as she did, by assembling a crazy social mix reminiscent of a largely bygone night life, by staging a celebrity mash-up — at which the guests included an American movie star; a celebrated Thai director; the scion of a Russian fortune; and a Scottish actor, writer, performer, director and night-life compulsive — and then adding the 500 guests who are willing to fork over as much \$1,000 apiece for the pleasure of rubbing elbows with artistic folk.

"I exhort you to try a glass of infused vodka," Mr. Cumming said through a microphone, as Api-chatpong Weerasethakul was piloted through a crowd of people who might even have seen his "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives," the film that won the Palme d'Or this year at Cannes; and Christian Schneider, a San Francisco filmmaker, capered about: half-naked and with red balloons affixed like pompons to his head; and Tracey Ryans, a marketing strategist, adjusted the eagle-feather headdress that was his contribution to the evening's red theme; and Maria Baibakova, a Russian heiress, preened in a burgundy vintage couture dress from Yves Saint-Laurent.

"Everyone always expects that if you're Russian that you'll be in a chinchilla jumpsuit, running around," said Ms. Baibakova, who made note of the fact that her embroidered dress was from the 1976 Saint-Laurent collection inspired by the Ballets Russes.

As Ms. Baibakova explained all this, Barbara Sukowa, the star of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's "Berlin Alexanderplatz," mounted a scaffold and began singing "The Partisans of Amur," backed by a trio that included Robert Longo, the artist and di-

rector, to whom Ms. Sukowa happens to be wed. And, more or less simultaneously, Ms. Rainer and her dancers began scooting around in a performance of "Assisted Living," a work involving, among other things, loopy sing-song recitations of quotations from William O. Douglas, William James and characters from Korean TV.

"Jump, turn, pitcher, batter, hug, lean, sponge, toast, rope," read the instructions Ms. Rainer provided to her dancers, who also made feline "paw-paw" gestures while the choreographer recited a speech about the signposts of amnesia.

Then dinner was served. People threw themselves at tables and ate root vegetables and braised oxtail and drank quantities of Champagne and Chilean wine. Ms. Sherman spoke admiringly of people who create live performance, since "I can barely think in terms of movement myself." Desert was announced, dessert in this case being a plywood installation resembling a padded cell lined with oblong blocks of pink cotton candy. The dessert had been created by Jennifer Rubell, a caterer who styles herself a "food artist," and guests were invited to tear off pieces of the food-art in hunks.

"It's kind of gross," one guest, returning in a sugar swoon from the cell's cloying interior, remarked to the table where Ms. Hathaway was seated.

Ms. Hathaway turned to Justin Conner, her date for the evening and a friend from Vassar College, and remarked that she attended a foam party once inside a similarly enclosed space, and that half the guests woke up with "pink eye" the following day.

"Don't say that, he'll write it down," Mr. Conner said, motioning in mock-horror toward the reporter, who had already done so.