Bard Mitzvah
NEW YORK 04.08.12

Left: Stedelijk Museum director Ann Goldstein with collector Audrey Irmas. Right: CCS Bard cofounder Maneluisa Hessel with CCS Bard director Tom Eccles. (All photos: Linda Yablonsky)

THEY CAME FROM AMSTERDAM, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Dallas, and New York. They included artists, dealers, and collectors, but primarily they were those often neglected, sometimes maligned and—unless employed by the Gagosian Gallery—usually underpaid brainiacs known as curators. For the twentieth anniversary of the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, that only made sense.

But the big draw for the 360 nonprofit banner-wavers gathered at Capitale on the Bowery last Wednesday night was the guest of honor, Ann Goldstein, who was to receive the new Audrey Irmas Award for Curatorial Excellence. Freshly endowed by Irmas, a philanthropist from LA, it is the only CCS award in fifteen years to come with a cash prize.

“How much is that?” New Museum curator Massimiliano Gioni inquired of Tom Eccles, director of the CCS. “It’s $25,000,” Eccles replied. “Forget this director shit,” he hooted. “I want to be nominated now too!” He might not have been kidding.

Left: Curator Markús Andrétsson. Right: Artist Roni Horn with dealer Paula Cooper.

How ironic that Goldstein had to wait till she left her longtime service as a curator to fill the director’s chair at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. But her twenty-six years at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles were not lost on the many artists present who benefited from solo exhibitions she gave them—Tony Oursler, Haim Steinbach, Christopher Wool, Louise Lawler, and Roni Horn, to name a few.
Goldstein’s curatorial colleagues—Donna De Salvo, Anne Rorimer, Ann Temkin, Kathy Halbreich, Matthew Higgs, Thelma Golden, Lynne Cooke, Elizabeth Smith, Kerry Brougher, Laura Hopfman, and Connie Butler (a former awardee)—all seemed pleased with the choice. “I think everyone here has a happy heart tonight,” said Wexner Center director Sherri Geldin. Dutch architect Ben van Berkel, who came with financier Rob Defares and other members of the Stedelijk’s board, certainly didn’t mind making the trip from the Low Countries. “We’re very supportive of Ann,” said Crouwel, who designed the new addition to the museum, set to open in September after a long hiatus for renovations.

The cocktail portion of the evening was almost as lengthy, but it gave the dealers present time to rub shoulders with the posses of artists, collectors, and foundation chiefs who moved across the floor in what felt like a reunion, though most saw each other often anyway.

Once the hungry horde found their seats at tables that ran from $5,000 to $30,000. Eccles took the stage to voice a few words of welcome. “We all hold Ann in the highest esteem,” he said. “Yes, we do.” said De Salvo, and suddenly we were in church. Markus Andréasson, an ’07 CCS alum, walked to the altar—I mean podium—to stand before a tall, saintly object draped in white cloth and congratulate the center on its twentieth anniversary. “Two decades in the art world can be an eternity,” he said, launching into a reminiscence of his time at Bard, where he came to understand that his role as a curator was to “safeguard the irrational...against the beast of rationality.”

The phrase would come back to haunt us as Andréasson’s Icelandic countryman Ragnar Kjartansson unveiled the painted white “art goddess” beneath the cloth—a dead ringer for CCS cofounder Marieluise Hessel, cuddling said “beast.” It looked like Dutchess County roadkill. Spritzing the wooden statue with a fog machine, Kjartansson dove behind it and, moving the puppet goddess’s lips, delivered an a cappella rendition of an early John Cage ballad set to two poems by e.e. cummings.

“Very charming,” said Lawrence Weiner, who designed the night’s pink and blue award after a mileage marker from a Lionel model train set. It came as a surprise to learn that Cage had a lyrical phase. “His music handles the sublime very well,” Kjartansson said, on returning to his front-and-center table. Horn, seated beside him, gave Kjartansson a sidelong glance. “He’s related to Mel Brooks, you know,” she cracked.

Left: Collectors Thea Westreich and Ethan Wagner. Right: Ann Goldstein with curators Anne Rorimer and Lynne Cooke.
With that we dug into our plates of beef, until a different art goddess, CCS graduate program director Johanna Burton, mounted the stage. Characterizing the qualities of a top curator as “risky, groundbreaking, and brave,” she outlined Goldstein’s career from her first duties as an unpaid librarian for the inchoate MoCA, through her stint at Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Art, and wound up with Goldstein’s return to MoCA, where she organized brave and groundbreaking exhibitions like “A Forest of Signs” (coordinated with Mary Jane Jacob) and “A Minimal Future? Art as Object, 1950–1968,” and defining solo shows for Barbara Kruger, Martin Kippenberger, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Mike Kelley, Cady Noland, Weiner and more. Many more.

Ilmas presented the award, which had been endowed before Goldstein’s selection. “Oh, it’s heavy!” said Goldstein, and gave her own speech. “I intended to be an artist,” she began. “And I thought I could support myself as an artist by working in a museum.” That got laughs. She learned how to curate on the job, and in Chicago encountered the art of the man she would marry, Christopher Williams. “In those days part of his work was not to attach his name to it,” she said, “so I didn’t know who he was.”

He had no trouble identifying her. “I knew the minute I met her that she was for me,” Williams said later. Yet, according to Goldstein, it was Ronner and another curator, Cooje van Brugge, who changed her life. “Oops! You never know what you might touch, and what a little luck might bring you,” she concluded. “Get this woman a drink!” Geldin called out.

Then it was Bard College president Leon Botstein’s turn to give what, for him, was a fairly mild-mannered speech about the state of higher learning in America, amid the distractions of iPads, smartphones, and Facebook. “It’s amazing how we speak so frequently and say so little,” he said, but some in the audience had already voiced the same thought. They departed to join the clutch of smokers outside. The moon was nearly full. A wind came up. Taxis stopped at the curb. And what? Eclos had called a “warm community of people who deliver what they promise” climbed into them and headed into the night, no doubt to wrestle once again with that damn beast of rationality.

— Linda Yablonsky

Left: Artist Lawrence Weiner. Right: Dia Foundation director Philippe Vergne with curator Sylvia Chisselton, New Museum associate director Massimiliano Gioni, and curator Cecilia Alemani.

Left: Dealer Max Fielden with artist Ann Collier. Right: Christie’s Amy Capelazzo with MoMA associate director Kathy Halbreich.
Left: Artists Barbara Bloom and Joan Jonas. Right: Dealer Carol Greene and artist Wade Guyton.

Left: Author Siddhartha Mukherjee and artist Sarah Sze. Right: Wexner Center director Sherrill Geldin.

Left: Hirshhorn Museum deputy director *Kerry Brougher* and Americans for the Arts advocate *Nora Helphern*. Right: *Lucy Sandler* and art historian *Irving Sandler*.

Left: Artist *Charline von Heyl* with Frieze Art Fair codirector *Amanda Sharp*. Right: Collector *Mickey Wolfson* with artist *Michele Oka Doner*.

Left: Artist *Christopher Wool*. Right: Artist *Christopher Williams* and *Anne Goldstein*. 
FROM THE EDITORS

In New York, tax season means benefit season, and last week marked the latter's kickoff, with galas for both the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard and the Film Society of Lincoln Center. As always, artforum.com was there, bringing news straight from the heart of the scene. Further abroad, in recent weeks our contributors have reported from the March Meeting in Sharjah and the Global Art Forum in Doha and Dubai; Sturtevant's opening in Stockholm; and Doug Aitken's SONG 1 in Washington, D.C.

Be sure to check out the April issue of the magazine, including such highlights as Rachel Kushner on Stan Douglas's Disco Angola, Diedrich Diederichsen on "Before the Law" at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, and a Top Ten from artist Hank Willis Thomas. And remember to keep up with artforum.com's latest reviews, our "500 Words" interviews with cultural luminaries, and regular updates from the world of cinema in our film column.

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SCENE & HERD

Linda Yablonsky on the 20th anniversary of Bard's Center for Curatorial Studies

[04.08.12] "They were those often neglected, sometimes maligned, and—unless employed by the Gagosian Gallery—usually underpaid braniacs known as curators."
— Linda Yablonsky

Kate Sutton around the 6th Art Dubai and Global ArtForum

[04.03.12] "These days, conversation programs are all the rage, tacked on to art fairs as penance for the messy commercialism of art, well, commerce, and as a convenient way to comp flights and hotel for the panel curator's past and future flings."
— Kate Sutton

Nicolas Trembley on Sturtevant at the Moderna Museet

[03.21.12] "Daniel Birnbaum, the Moderna Museet's director, told me that Sturtevant, in a way, had always been present here. It's like we've been waiting for her. She's in the museum's DNA."
— Nicolas Trembley