Patronage in the Pot Pie
At the Dia Art Foundation's 'Fall Night' Gala

Plumbing and chicken pot pie served as surprise subjects for artistic appraisal at the Dia Art Foundation's "Fall Night" gala on Monday night in Chelsea. The evening began with dinner for 400 benefactors and friends.

"What a week we're having," Dia Director Philippe Vergne said, in wry acknowledgment of less than exuberant news. (Last week, two of Dia's founders filed suit against the institution over plans to auction part of its collection to raise funds; on Tuesday, after the event, the lawsuit was subsequently withdrawn.)

The mood was more philosophical than somber, though, in line with an institution founded for art made to transpire over years, decades—even eons of time. "Dia is an unfinished project," Mr. Vergne said, speaking of new ambitions to add to iconic works like "The Lightning Field" in New Mexico and "The New York Earth Room," a loft in SoHo filled with dirt.

The speeches ended with a tribute to that most earthy and unpretentious of foods: chicken pot pie. "Every time you swallow a piece of chicken pot pie," Mr. Vergne said, "you are making an art of patronage. Tonight you are eating Carl Andre."

The party moved next door for a performance by Matmos, an electronic-music duo known for making playful music from conceptually sampled sounds. They crafted a dance track from duck calls played throughout the room, a former marble works location, and then proceeded to throw metal pipes against a wall to sound in different keys. Then came the piece de resistance, which proved site-specific and then some.

"I don't know what to say about it," said Rafael Lemus, a literary scholar attending the event. "I liked the tubes."

The tubes were revealed by a plumber who removed a toilet from the site and snaked a video camera deep into the innards of the city through the hole in the floor. A large screen
showed the results, with gurgling, dripping music made in accompaniment. Reactions varied.

An audience member, seemingly repulsed and rapt at once, called out, "That's the grossest thing I've ever seen in my life."

"It was like a plumbing show," said Quincy Flowers, in favor. "Have I ever seen anything like that? Hell no."

"I liked the way they used the space," said fashion stylist Ben Sturgill. "It had a religious, nearly Satanic feeling to it, like the Illuminati."

The plumber, Angelo Monsanto from Hub Plumbing in Greenwich Village, deemed it a rousing success. "It was a blast," he said. "I had more fun than I thought I was going to have."

As the music turned over to a DJ for dancing, Mr. Vergne, making the rounds, was pleased with the unique evening, which raised $700,000 for his foundation. "We want people to see something they've never seen before," he said. "We are Dia."