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NY CULTURE

Dia Looks to Future While Honoring Past

Art Foundation Aims to Restore Its Presence in Chelsea



Dia Art Foundation's Fall Night gala *BENJAMIN LOZOVSKY/BFANYC.COM*

By **ANDY BATTAGLIA**

Updated Nov. 5, 2014 7:31 p.m. ET

On Monday night in Chelsea, an industrial wall played home to projections of a man stumbling around and staring at vast tracts of steel, string and neon light—the kind of materials revered by the Dia Art Foundation. The images were from a film of dancer Steve Paxton at play in Dia's monumental museum upstate, and the occasion was the foundation's annual Fall Night gala.

Among the attendees were art-world luminaries indebted to Dia's 40-year history in New York, which includes pioneering activity in SoHo in the '70s, Chelsea in the '80s and, most recently, upstate in Dia:Beacon's 300,000-square-foot exhibition space in Dutchess County. All eyes, however, were on one person: Jessica Morgan, a curator from London named to serve as Dia's new director starting in January.

“Of course I’m working,” Ms. Morgan said, though she was ostensibly just a guest.

Her top priority will be to restore Dia’s presence in Chelsea, a neighborhood whose art-embracing status the foundation helped establish, by way of plans for a large new exhibition space still awaiting construction despite years of fundraising.



Cindy Rachofsky, Howard Rachofsky and Marguerite Hoffman *BENJAMIN LOZOVSKY/BFANYC.COM*

Dashing in a matching jacket and shirt by Alexander McQueen, Dia trustee Howard Rachofsky signaled high hopes for the foundation’s future.

“I think we’re in the best place we’ve been in a decade,” he said. “We’ve been wrestling with our next step for a long time, and I think we’ve found the right person to help lead us back to the city.”

The Fall Night benefit, which drew 370 attendees to two of Dia’s empty buildings in Chelsea and raised \$750,000 for the foundation, also gave rise to news of an ambitious new Dia project in Puerto Rico, to set a historic Dan Flavin neon-light sculpture in a cave.

“What Dia does for artists is to support them and their crazy projects,” Nathalie de Gunzburg, head of Dia’s board, said of the project, concocted by the artist duo Allora & Calzadilla. “That’s what makes Dia a different institution.”

Ms. Morgan said the new project honors Dia’s legacy while allowing for change.

“Every program that we take on now is of course situated in the 21st century, not a project from the ’70s,” she said.

She remains committed to the classics, though.

“It’s shocking to me talking to people who have never been to the ‘Earth Room,’” she said of a decades-old Dia installation that features 280,000 pounds of dirt in an otherwise empty SoHo loft. “Part of what I want to do too is to make sure people understand that these places are here and they should be part of the pilgrimage.”

Corrections & Amplifications

An earlier version of this article misspelled Nathalie de Gunzburg’s surname (Nov. 5, 2014).



Laura de Gunzburg and Nathalie de Gunzburg
BENJAMIN LOZOVSKY/BFANYC.COM

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