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Contemplating Art, and Its Sideshow

By KATHERINE KNORR

PARIS — When the city Museum of Modern Art, lodged in a wing of the Palais de Tokyo near the Trocadéro, and its separated twin (confusingly known simply as the Palais de Tokyo), decided, also confusingly, to cooperate on a contemporary art exhibition, there was only one thing to do: Make sure the opening “V.I.P.” party for “Dynasty” was quite a scene.

In this they succeeded last week, despite menacing clouds and slick pavement, filling to capacity (and until past midnight) the 1937 building’s incommensurate terrace with a mostly young and fairly international crowd, eclectically conformist, dressed neo-bohemian or metrosexual, shaved heads, white-guy dreadlocks, and a lot of perilously high heels, themselves genuine works of contemporary art. Drinks kiosks (paying) on every corner, D.J.s (or whatever) hovering over their laptops. Smoking allowed! Party on.

As the exhibition visitors poured into the kitsch movie-set building, waving their “V.I.P.” invites, there was serious indecision in the sauna-like air of the galleries.

(There sure are a lot of V.I.P.s out there — or veep, as the very friendly greeters pronounced. But in this veep world, this wasn’t Dynasty, it was Democracy. With the same invitation, you could choose your own class: Arrive at 6, you were a veep, arrive at 8, you were just at a vernissage, arrive later, you were a party person, Soirée D.J.)

Which way did the show start? Any way you want! Doesn’t matter. Move along, move along. Thick, ad-full catalogs (starting with a well-known furniture store and closing with Japanese whiskey. International, yes!) were given away like bonbons. No menacing cash registers here, no disapproving looks, no old-fashioned art history. We are all pleasantly non-judgmental, and the visitor must be, too.

“Are they waiting for the drinks?” said one Mr. Shaved Head to Ms. Spike Heels as he pointed toward a tidal-wave crowd movement underneath gigantic twisted clear tubes, which may or may

not have been opening or closing the art show. "I am."

"Dynasty," running until Sept. 5, consists of works by 40 artists, born after 1975 and working in France, asked by the museum directors/curators, Fabrice Hergott and Marc-Olivier Wahler, to show two pieces, one for each part of the divided building. The result, with its inevitable mixture of genres and the now tried-and-true multimedia-is-the-message, is a kind of D.I.Y. surrealistic kit to be put together, or not, as the viewer wishes. A dream world for the short attention span crowd. As is to be expected, the museum explains its goal in pleasantly opaque artspeak: they seek to "reveal the energy that inhabits these artists, but also their questioning, their ambiguities or their paradoxes." Well, we know how they feel, now don't we?

On veep night, the wanderers did a fair amount of wandering, probably a little less viewing, as on most opening nights. Those who sought to identify, if not the reason for the works then at least their makers and the medium used, were hampered by labels somewhat randomly affixed to walls (very postmodern this) and in such tiny type as to serve as Dada eye charts.

Among the young, bald and hairy (and the wannabe young but still hairy, notably one Mr. Dreadlocks, not a day under 40, and with piercings studding his lined face), were some older, more disciplined people. Dressed for a solemn outing, quietly sitting on the benches in film-showing alcoves, they made an effort to make sense of it all. Here, in this pleasantly leafy movie, this fine farm family, most beautifully dressed: See them eat, like mechanical dolls. See them hang laundry as the camera loves the beautiful texture of the cloth. See the chicken free-roam. "Où est le cheval?" asks a subtitle. "Où est le cheval?" Oh oh, that minor-earthquake camera tremor! We're going to find out very very soon where that horse is ... NOOOOO!

Time to move on to the racier videos, the loudly musical naked air guitar group (whatever), which drew quite a crowd, or the sleeping people who briefly started showing skin, or the sleeping (dead? no, sleeping) old man with amazing eyebrows; up goes the camera to a touching picture of a young Chinese couple (artist: Chen Yang). The march of time. Who knows.

In this mix, caveat viewer, are surprisingly delicate teases on the outrageous, executed in some cases (Mélanie Delattre-Vogt) like old-fashioned, aesthetically pleasing anatomical illustrations (pencil, pigments and blood) even as the small framed works spell out a hair-raising recipe. Or in a surprisingly figurative vein, the paintings of Farah Atassi, studio, kitchen, tenement, and the haunting, darkly spooky (oil on canvas!) parking lots of Guillaume Bresson. And not to miss the truly mixed-media call-it-what-you-will shelf by Jorge Pedro Núñez, with stacked stools, books, CDs, stereo equipment, TVs ("Watts Towers," sort of. Or a scale model of the same, in Los

Angeles). Or the gallery partition (Not!) that's really another work, by Antoine Dorotte (aquatint on zinc). Take a look. There is plenty of time, and the party is getting louder.

As the terrace filled, and a new crowd launched a second surge into the building, Mr. Dreadlocks reappeared, a little the worse for wear, with a friend. "Do you want to see the exhibition, or do you want a drink?" He didn't wait for the answer. Down the stairs, out into the rainy air on the terrace, one more beer, Soirée D.J. *Ars longa, vita brevis.*