



07.23.06 **Strange Magic**

New York



Left: Creative Time curator Peter Eleey with artist Miranda Lichtenstein. Right: Collector Beth DeWoody with Creative Time director Anne Pasternak. (Except where noted, all photos: David Velasco)

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I grew up with the occult—matronly "aunts" introducing me to the teachings of Aleister Crowley and pagan activist Starhawk and stores with names like Moonshadow and Mother Earth Magick. Now, years after laying aside the mysteries of runes, tarot, and numerology, I found myself summoned to the East Village for Tuesday night's preview of "Strange Powers," Creative Time's fantastical group show (named after a Magnetic Fields song) exploring supernatural transformation. Creative Time's Peter Eleey and the New Museum's Laura Hoptman, the exhibition's curators, both share a conviction that "art can change the world," though Hoptman seemed most interested in the otherworldly properties of the objects, while Eleey clung to a more empirical position. The curators took their charge seriously, down to their participation in Douglas Gordon's work requesting that the nonprofit organization "do something evil." "One intern's entire job was to locate the most powerful curse," noted Hoptman. "She eventually convinced a satanic cult to share their formula."

The hex—performed on a letter-size area of black paint—was cast mere hours before the main event. Creative Time, like the Adversary, prefers its evil fresh. The other charms, rituals, and psychic ephemera—including Euan Macdonald's spellbinding video, *Healer*, 2002, and a pitch-black room containing *The Ghost of James Lee Byars*, 1969—felt at home in the raw, reportedly haunted former theater building. Exhibition artist Miranda Lichtenstein was on hand to discuss her documentation of a spiritual "cleansing" of the space. Meanwhile, Mari Spirito, just through curating her own summer group show, "A Broken Arm," at 303 Gallery, recruited visitors to investigate an eerie glow emanating from a chink in a wall. Was it art? A poltergeist? Was it available as an edition?

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Left: New Museum curator Laura Hoptman tests out Senga Nengudi's installation *Makes Clean*. Right: Dealer Andrew Kreps, 303 Gallery's Mari Spirito, *Frieze* US editor James Trainor, and Anne Pasternak.

Dinner was held at the slick new Chinatown Brasserie, a restaurant haunted by memories of the sorely missed performance venue Fez. Passing the subterranean lounge's carp-laden pond, I wondered: What would Fez favorite Karen Finley have done with all these fish? I dove into the sticky dumplings and moo shu, while dealer Andrew Kreps confessed to being "politically opposed to meat" between mouthfuls of chicken. When the discussion turned to the conspicuous lack of meat-based work in Chelsea, artist Peter Coffin divulged that his very first sculpture, crafted at the prime age of sixteen, was a "scary monster made from raw meat." "Where is it now?" I wondered. "I ate it." Before the conversation grew completely unpalatable, I switched back to the show's theme, asking Kreps if he believed in ghosts. "Nope," he said. "I believe in a lot of freaky things. But ghosts? Too specific."

Spirited away by taxi, I was tardy for PS 1's thirtieth-anniversary roller-disco benefit at The Roxy, just missing the school-*cum*-museum's headmistress Alanna Heiss. Having advocated for the space since 1976, I can hardly blame her for calling it an early night. Taking to the arena with camera in hand, I contemplated the wisdom of mixing rinks with drinks, though I didn't have to think long before stumbling over the falling bodies of haphazard art lovers. Remembering that curator Ali Subotnick broke her arm at a Roxy bash hosted by David Zwirner three years ago, I slowed myself to a snail's pace.



Left: Fashion designer Cynthia Rowley. Right: Sean Kelly Gallery's Boshko Boskovic and Tei Carpenter.

Earlier at dinner, collector Beth Rudin DeWoody galvanized me with memories of Susanne Bartsch's infamous Roxy Halloween parties, but tonight was a decidedly less costumed affair. A few adventurous skaters donned their "Le Freaky" best, but despite the disco fever, the bicentennial theme of my boyfriend's outfit went without comment. Perhaps his ensemble was too specific. I bumped into Cynthia Rowley, dolled up in a flowing, white, *Xanadu*-esque one-piece. "Before tonight, I had no idea that my husband was such a rock-and-roll, hotshot, roller-skating fiend," said the demure fashion maven, who's co-hosting another PS 1 anniversary fundraiser, a revisitation of the museum's inaugural Prom party, this October.

As the crowd thinned, the floor was reinvigorated by the introduction of a small posse of "Strange Powers" stragglers, including Eleey, Spirito, and Creative Time's Maureen Sullivan. I admit surprise at their finesse: Spirito adroitly demonstrated a scrunched-down cannonball technique, giving her speed if not delicacy. "Who needs drugs? Who needs the gym? This is so fun!" she enthused. But the fun couldn't last forever, and by 1 AM, dance legends First Choice were singing "it's not over" through the club's Phazon sound system while skaters examined their injuries. (Their endurance was rewarded,

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