



Performance Art Drives “The Big Bang” Over the Top

July 31, 2012

by Pat Rogers

DISPATCH - JULY 30, 2012 (8:45 a.m.)

WATER MILL, NY

The rain poured but it did not dissuade the frivolity and dramatic fun presented by The Watermill Center during its 19th Annual Watermill Center Summer Benefit. “The Big Bang” was held on Saturday, July 28, 2012 and featured a cornucopia of performance art, installations and the over-the-top atmosphere that helps make the annual benefit the party of the season.

Contributors to “The Big Bang” make up a hit list of artists and performers. The art auction selection committee includes Robert Wilson, Marina Abramovic, Taryn Simon, Marie-Claude Beaud and others. Artists contributing work to the auction included Abramovic, Alice Aycock, William Wegman, Will Ryman, Terry Richardson and others.

This year’s benefit also included the solo exhibition “Mike Kelley: 1954-2012” – A Tribute Exhibition in collaboration with the Luma Foundation. Curated by Harald Falckenberg, the show remains on view through Sept 16, 2012 by appointment.

During the benefit, dramatic performance art and installations demanded attention amid the silent auction. The performances and installations were curated by Noah Khoshbin and Dmitry Komis. The works presented were diverse with some taking an ominous tone.

For instance, performers wearing shrouds conjuring images of hangman hovering around the next candidate for an unseen gallows walked silently in the woods. They were part of a multi-faceted installation and performance art piece by Desi Santiago that mingled neon, inflatables and performers in clandestine locales.

A sound and performance piece by Paula Garcia was stunning for the primal horror it presented. Triumph trumped horror when endurance won and the subject of a heavy metal stoning was revealed to be unscathed.

Even amid some of more outrageous and wacky performances (say a neon orange penis carried triumphantly by a pack of body-painted women with bad attitudes) had an underbelly where fright might find a home.

Here’s a look at some of the scenes that unfolded during “The Big Bang”:



Entrance to "The Big Bang" - The 19th Annual Watermill Center Summer Benefit.



"Big Bubbles" by Misaki Kawai greets visitors after passing through the Big Bang entrance.



"Butt-Plug" by Paul McCarthy was the artwork centerpiece rising prominently in the courtyard. "Butt-Plug," 2007. Vinyl-coated nylon, fans, rigging. Unique, 60 feet.

McCarthy's artworks "lampoon polite society, ridicule authority and bombard the viewer with a sensory overload, of often sexually-tinged, violent imagery," according to a benefit catalogue.

"With irreverent wit, McCarthy often takes aim at cherished American myths and icons, adding a touch of malice to subjects that have been traditionally revered for their innocence or purity."



"Competition" by Wang Qingsong. For "The Big Bang," the Chinese artist was commissioned to "reimagined the apocalyptic world inhabited in his photograph "Competition." The image is made up of "hand painted posters and commercial notices mixing contemporary urban detritus with the tradition of Chinese calligraphy," according to the benefit catalogue.



"Competition" continued to transform amid pouring rain and mingling party goers.



The girls of "The Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black" strike a pose at the base of "Butt-Plug" by Paul McCarthy as part of their performance piece by Kembra Pfahler that's part of the new piece "fuck island."

Meanwhile, art installations and performance pieces were secreted among the forested grounds surrounding the courtyard of the Watermill Center.



“Slingshot” by Hanna Reidmar.



“Arty” by Misaki Kawai, 2012. Acrylic, fabric, foam, fur and wood, 225 x 300 inches.



“Memory Master” by Masanao Hirayama.



“Home Sweet Home” by Tucker Marder.



“Endgame” by Kitty Huffman.



Meanwhile, “The Big Bang” and the silent auction, cocktail party and performance pieces continued to rage...



“Circuitous Graze” by Janice Lancaster Larsen.



“Mr. Balloon” by Thanassis Akokkalidis.



“Series Noise Body” by Paula Garcia.



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BASIC FACTS: The Watermill Center is a laboratory for performance founded by Robert Wilson. The Center draws emerging and established artists from around the world to explore and develop new ideas during residencies. Living and working among Wilson’s extensive collection of art and artifacts “lies at the heart of the Watermill experience,” according to a mission statement.

Contributing artists to The Big Bang include Misaki Kawai, Wang Qingsong, Kembra Pfahler, Desi Santiago, Lucien Smith, ATOPOS, Paul McCarthy, Paula Garcia, Masanao Hirayama and sculpture by Carol Ross.

For information, visit <http://watermillcenter.org>