

Fall Galas: Museums are Honoring the Young and Old and Bringing Artists Together Across Disciplines

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE on Nov 26, 2019

IT'S GALA SEASON and museums have been hosting star-studded fetes honoring artists and raising funds to support their programs and venues.

Artist **Rashid Johnson** was honored at Performa 19's opening night gala, paid tribute to a fellow artist at the Dia Art Foundation, and co-chaired the Guggenheim Museum's gala. (He serves as a trustee at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and is a board member at Performa, where he reimagined "Dutchman" (1964), Amiri Baraka's one-act play, at Performa 13.)

Studio Museum in Harlem Director and Chief Curator **Thelma Golden** presided over the Studio Museum's gala and celebrated at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). Many others attended multiple events too, including artists **Charles Gaines**, **Amy Sherald**, and **Julie Mehretu**.



The Los Angeles County Museum of Art's Art + Film Gala (Nov. 2, 2019) paid tribute to artist Betye Saar, shown with John Legend who introduced her and LACMA Director Michael Govan. | Photo

LACMA held its annual Art + Film Gala honoring artist **Betye Saar** and filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón on Nov. 2. **Donald Glover** introduced Cuarón. **John Legend** gave a tribute to Saar, 93.

Legend said: "Betye is one of the most important artists of her generation at the vanguard of assemblage art. In fact, she really helped define the genre. And she's an icon of the feminist and black arts movements with her unique ability to remember, to reclaim, and to remix black history, good and bad, and turn it into beautiful, powerful work."

The first exhibition to focus on her sketchbooks, ["Betye Saar: Call and Response"](#) is currently on view at LACMA. The show is also the first exhibition at a California museum to reflect her entire career.

Saar wore Gucci and Neil Lane jewels. In her gala remarks, she said in part, “It’s really wonderful to be able to live your life doing what you love to do. And that’s what art is to me.” Saar concluded: “I’m so pleased to have all of you come and celebrate this... All I can say is thank you. Thank you.”

“Betye [Saar] is one of the most important artists of her generation at the vanguard of assemblage art.” — John Legend

Eva Chow and Leonardo DiCaprio co-chaired the LACMA gala, which was “presented” by Gucci. Anderson .Paak and his band the Free Nationals performed. LACMA Vice President of Education and Public Programming Naima Keith was there and the many artists, donors, cultural and film industry figures in attendance included **Mark Bradford, Naomi Campbell, Troy Carter, Ava DuVernay, Adrienne Edwards, Cynthia Erivo, Charles Gaines,, Thelma Golden, Lauren Halsey, Selma Hayek, Regina King, Julie Mehretu, Santigold, Yara Shahidi, Swizz Beatz, Henry Taylor, and Tyler, the Creator.** (Golden and Carter serve on the LACMA board of trustees.)



BRIC President Kristina Newman-Scott addresses the Brooklyn nonprofit's gala on Nov. 7, 2019. I Courtesy BRIC, Photo by Jordan Rathkopf/Rathkopf.com

Bradford told the [Los Angeles Times](#): “I feel like Alfonso is in the breadth of his career, firing off on all cylinders. And Betye is like this elder statesman. They can almost learn from each other. It’s perfect.”

The Museum of Arts and Design held its [MAD Ball](#) at Cipriani in New York (Nov. 4) and announced artist **Indira Allegra** won the 2019 Burke Prize, recognizing the future of craft. Detroit-born, Oakland, Calif.-based Allegra explores grief and memorial practices through a variety of mediums including weaving, installation, and performance. Her work is on view at the museum through April 12, 2020, along with the finalists for the prize.

BRIC's [annual gala](#) (Nov. 7) at Knockdown Center in Brooklyn honored 2019 Colene Brown Art Prize recipients. **Artists Nicole Awai, Xenobia Bailey, Nona Faustine, Alicia Grullón, and Christopher Myers,** were among the 10 winners. Other attendees included artist **Renee Cox** and **Tom Finkelpearl**, commissioner of NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, who announced on Oct. 31 that he was stepping down and his tenure would conclude at the

end of the year. **Kristina Newman-Scott** is the president of BRIC, which presents free cultural programming in Brooklyn.

Torkwase Dyson received the Joyce Alexander Wein Artist Prize at the Studio Museum's annual fall gala on Nov. 13 at the Javits Center in New York. The \$50,000 prize recognizes exceptional "innovation, promise, and creativity." Dyson's practice explores black spacial politics. In a statement about receiving the award, Dyson said, "[A]s I go about the world trying to make art work for us, this strengthens my commitment to black spatial justice. I'm so excited for this new sense of belonging."

Artists **Fred Wilson** and **Sanford Biggers** attended the SculptureCenter's annual gala (Nov. 5) and served on the Benefit Committee. Guests at the New Museum's NextGen Dinner (Nov. 7) included **Jamillah James** of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles who is curating the 2021 edition of the New Museum Triennial.



In Washington, D.C., the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery (NPG) held its American Portrait Gala (Nov. 17). Lin-Manuel Miranda, Anna Wintour, and **Earth, Wind & Fire** were among the six recipients of the Portrait of a Nation Prize. First Lady **Michelle Obama** (whose historic portrait by Amy Sherald was unveiled at the museum in February 2018) was on hand to present Miranda with the honor.

NPG recently acquired portraits of each prize recipient. Earth, Wind & Fire's portrait is a 1978 photograph by Bruce W. Talamon. Over the course of his five-decade career, Talamon has photographed R&B and jazz musicians, Hollywood film productions, Bob Marley onstage and behind-the-scenes, and David Hammons during the early 1970s making body prints in his Los Angeles studio.

The Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden hosted its annual gala in New York at Lincoln Center (Nov. 4). Celebrating artists across generations, **Theaster Gates** was a co-chair and **Jordan Casteel, Faith Ringgold, Amy Sherald, Deborah Roberts, and David Hartt**, were among the honorees.

"The innovative aspects of Sam [Gilliam]'s work is what draws me. The removal of the canvas from the stretcher is a radical gesture, along with his deft touch, sensibility, palate, sophistication, and employment of color."
— Rashid Johnson

Rashid Johnson, Mary Schmidt Campbell, Melvin Edwards, Ashley Olsen, and Mary-Kate Olsen co-chaired the Dia Art Foundation's gala (Nov. 17) honoring **Sam Gilliam**. George Economou, Agnes Gund, **Thelma Golden, Melvin Edwards, Charles Gaines, Julie Mehretu, Adam Pendleton, and Stephanie Gilliam**, the artist's daughter, were among those who gathered at the Chelsea event. Edwards, Gilliam, Gaines and Johnson got together for a memorable photo, one for the art history books. And Johnson paid tribute to Gilliam, who has a show up at Dia:Beacon.

Vogue reported on the Dia gala and cited Johnson's remarks. "The innovative aspects of Sam's work is what draws me," he said. "The removal of the canvas from the stretcher is a radical gesture, along with his deft touch, sensibility, palate, sophistication, and employment of color. All of those things combine to give us a clear understanding of how important Sam is an artist." **CT**

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Gave a speech in honor of the amazing Sam Gilliam last night @diaartfoundation
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Fan girling last night @hirshhorn gala! @asherald @jordanmcasteel @thenarv33 @arnoldfriend6 @theastergates with Julian Schnabel, Mary Heilmann and Marina Abramović #lincolncenter #hirshorngala #asherald #rdeborah191 #vielmetterlosangeles #artistsxartists #myshot

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The most exciting moment of #madball2019 was the announcement of @indiraallegra as the winner of the 2019 #BurkePrize! Named for craft collectors Marian and Russell Burke, the juried prize constitutes an unrestricted award in the amount of \$50,000 given to an artist age forty-five or under working in glass, fiber, clay, metal, or wood. The Burke Prize recognizes the achievements of a young artist who is advancing the mediums and disciplines that shaped the American studio craft movement.

One of the Burke Prize judges, Julia-Bryan-Wilson, Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at UC Berkeley, said of the artist, "Allegra embodies the future of craft celebrated by the Burke Prize through tactile investigations of the past that continue to be searingly relevant. She epitomizes a dynamic, forward-looking orientation to craft that learns from the past in order to speak to the future." The work of Allegra and her fellow finalists for the Burke Prize is on view until April 12, 2020.

#burkeprize2019 #indiraallegra

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