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## Art Meets Feast, And Feast Steals the Show



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By RANDY KENNEDY

IT was a sunny Easter Sunday on the Upper East Side, but the pig of honor did not look much like a traditional Easter ham.

It was carefully deconstructed, with severed legs and a severed head, apple shoved firmly between its jaws. It was pierced with skewers like a porky St. Sebastian and carried out of the prep kitchen on a mirrored platter surrounded by red feathers.

Then again, the tables where this pig was to be consumed weren't exactly grandmother's. They sat like a small island in the middle of the 55,000-square-foot drill hall of the Park Avenue Armory on 67th Street.

One of the largest unobstructed interiors in the city, the armory has recently been reborn as a hangar-size playground for performance artists (and just plain old performers; more than 100 musicians gathered there recently to play Mahler's Symphony No. 2 in preparation for a coming concert series). Which brings us back, strangely, to the pig.

Besides being very well cooked — its legs were braised in a mushroom broth and the rest was deboned and stuffed with ground pork, raisins, carrots and herbs — this pig was playing a secondary role as a piece of art, an evanescent one that would soon exist only in the fond memories of about 100 people who were to eat pieces of it.



**A SEND-OFF**  
The Whitney Biennial included a Gypsy-theme dinner on Sunday at the Park Avenue Armory, where guests dined on lamb-swordfish kebabs, below, and a pig, deconstructed.



"Aw, little piggy," said Alex Apparu, a young cook, as he rushed around a room just off the cavernous hall, preparing plates for guests who were taking their seats. He opened a heated cabinet and raised a piece of aluminum foil to show off the pig's head. "The head is just for decoration, as far as I know," he said.

He could not be too certain, though, because he was operating in the strange and unpredictable territory where dinner party meets performance art.

Outside the prep kitchen, the artists Rita Ackermann and Agathe Snow (who is Mr. Apparu's sister) were rushing around a long, makeshift table surrounded by mismatched thrift-store chairs, making last-minute preparations for the surreal Easter dinner that they had planned together as a culinary work of art.

The artists stood out in the milling crowd: Ms. Snow, 31, wore an orange-and-blue Mets Afro wig and Ms. Ackermann, 39, a platinum-blond one, a kind of helmet-shaped pageboy reminiscent of the hairdo of Gilda Radner's Roseanne Roseannadanna.

The meal they had designed was a kind of last supper for the supporting part the armory played in this year's Whitney Biennial.

For the first time, the Biennial extended substantially beyond the Whitney Museum of American Art's Madison Avenue confines to occupy many of the wood-paneled period rooms and other spaces inside the armory from March 6 through Sunday night (the Biennial exhibits at the Whitney itself remain on display through June 1).

The armory accompaniment focused on performance-based art, like a dance marathon staged by Ms. Snow and impromptu, amateur therapy sessions held by another artist, Bert Rodriguez.

So Ms. Snow and Ms. Ackermann, who have collaborated on

The guests were entertained but mostly well fed.

eating-centered performance art before, thought that a good way was to invite friends, artists and curators, and strangers who had signed up on the Web, to eat Easter dinner with them.

They had the help of Art Production Fund, a nonprofit organization that presents often-complicated public art installations in the city. They also received some money from an art collector and investor, Randy Slifka (no one would say how much but emphasized that as big art-world dinners go, this one was done on a shoestring, with plastic plates).

And, if all else failed — if the food turned out to be dull and art somehow did not materialize in its presence — they could certainly rely on all the chilled bottles of Dom Pérignon's 1999 vintage, which were donated by the Champagne-maker in one of its first forays into contemporary art.

A spokeswoman for the vintner, Tanya Kostic, said she did not like to think of Dom Pérignon's participation as a sponsorship — as in Budweiser sponsoring NASCAR drivers — but as more of a collaboration. "Dom Pérignon is about passion," she said. "And I think people are going to leave here tonight inspired and passionate."

Given that guests were each given a bottle of Champagne, some left more inspired and passionate than others. Though by the wild standards of art feasts (the artist Gordon Matta-Clark once served a performance-piece

dinner consisting mostly of bones — bone marrow, frogs' legs, oxtail soup — and guests wore the remains home around their necks as bone jewelry) the Easter dinner was pretty tame.

At about 10:15, as workers started to flick the lights to signal an end to the party, one of the young women hired to bus the tables and to carry around signs between courses started shattering wine glasses on the back of a chair, prompting a dinner organizer to rush over to her, shouting, "No, no, no, no, no!"

The ostensible theme of the dinner was a Gypsy confidence game called bajour, in which lonely women are cheated out of their life savings.

Upon arriving, guests were also handed cards that assigned them the roles of various animals. Two ladders were erected over the tables, atop which Ms. Ackermann and Ms. Snow briefly sat to play referee for a game or a performance or a round of charades that never got under way. The Gypsy theme was carried out mainly by women wearing gauzy dresses and scarves.

But no one appeared to mind or notice because the food, made by the artists with the help of Mr. Apparu and Martine Abitbol, the mother of Ms. Snow and Mr. Apparu and a former restaurant owner, would have been just as good if it had been served with no art in sight.

It was vaguely Eastern European, with cabbage rolls and caviar-topped potatoes, and, by way of experimental-chef-land, included touches like anchovy-flavored crème fraîche and a liquefied salad made of puréed cucumber and cactus, served in a paper cone.

"We made up our own imperialist menu," Ms. Snow said. "Real Gypsy food is not at all a match for Champagne. It's a disaster."