



Texas Tea Party

CULTURE | By ALIX BROWNE | MARCH 6, 2012



The artist Josephine Meckseper (center) with Art Production Fund's Doreen Remen and Yvonne Force Villareal at the party for Meckseper's Manhattan Oil Project.

Neil Rasmus/BFAnyc.com

Last night, Josephine Meckseper celebrated the official opening of the **Manhattan Oil Project**, a pair of eerily lifelike oil jack pumps on an empty lot on the corner of Eighth Avenue and 46th Street in Midtown Manhattan. The artist, who had spent much of the past week in a foreman's uniform — hard hat, yellow safety vest and muddy Hunter rain boots — glammed up for the occasion in a jewel-studded black shirt, bolo tie and a sharply tailored black jacket. "I look like an oil baroness," she said, laughing. Nevertheless, the vibe last night at the **Playwright Celtic Pub** was decidedly more Carhartt than Christian Louboutin. The Irish pub, which overlooks the site, not only provided bar snacks for the evening's festivities, but also, for the duration of the installation, it supplies the electricity that sets the piece in motion for several hours each day. Guests gazed out a shamrock-festooned window at the lot below, where the black and red oil jack pumps bobbed playfully up and down like a pair of industrial ponies grazing in a field, an enormous billboard for "Jesus Christ Superstar" looming in the background. Someone wondered aloud if the piece looked more real — or just more sinister — at night than it did during the day. Indeed, a big part of the Manhattan Oil Project experience is watching the expressions on the faces of passers-by, which range from amusement to total disbelief. For many, apparently, it is not totally out of the realm of possibility that Times Square would require its own oil source. But as Meckseper observed earlier in the week, "The German tourists all know that it's art."



The installation at 46th Street and Eighth Avenue.



The artist Rachel Feinstein and Sotheby's Tobias Meyer.



Gossip Girl's Ed Westwick the artist Richard Phillips.