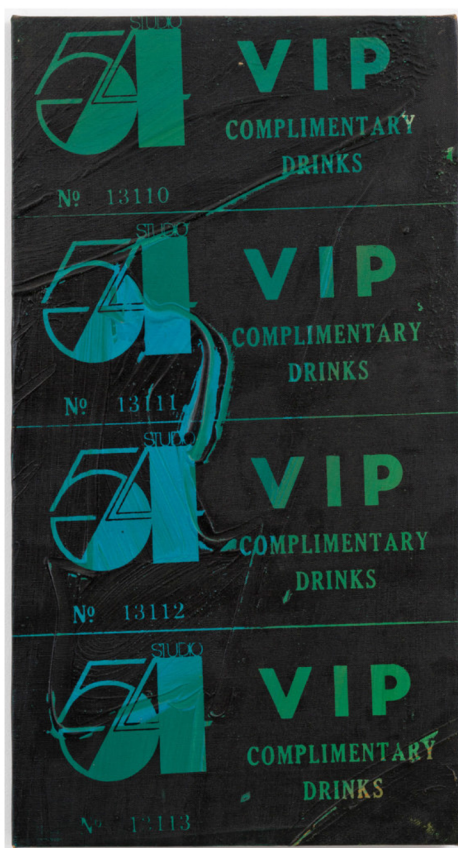




About Last Night | A Chelsea Gallery, Made Over as a Decadent Nightclub

By JULIE BAUMGARDNER

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Andy Warhol's "Studio 54 VIP," 1978. *Courtesy of the artist and Friedman Benda*

Baumgardner, Julie. "About Last Night: A Chelsea Gallery, Made Over as a Decadent Nightclub," *New York Times Style Magazine*. July 18, 2013.

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Who

Leave it to the Germans to inject a little üntz into the sleepy New York art world summer. Clad in a skin-tight, white Rick Owens long-sleeve tee, leather Ralph Lauren pants and United Nude high-tops, the Berlin-born curator Thorsten Albertz did exactly that — literally! — at the opening of his group show at Friedman Benda Gallery Tuesday night, telling the D.J. to “pump up the bass.” The artists Nicolas Provost, Natalie Frank, Ena Swansea and Bill Beckley — all of whom are featured in the exhibition, which also includes work by Andy Warhol, David LaChapelle, Nan Goldin, Andreas Gursky, Wolfgang Tillmans and Dash Snow — swept past the velvet rope to get their groove on inside. (As at any hot spot, the door was manned by hawk-eyed bouncers and a woman with a clipboard, and had a strict 18-and-over policy.) Friends and fellow creatives included José Parlá and Robert Lazzarini, while the curators Tim Goossens and Eric Shiner sipped vodka-cranberries alongside Beth Rudin-DeWoody, Tiffany Dubin, Barry Friedman and Patricia Pastore.

What

Titled “And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music,” the show is an aesthetic reflection of clubland. While the phrase is from Nietzsche’s “Thus Spoke Zarathustra,” the gallerist Marc Benda suggested the title after reading an interview with the actress Megan Fox. “She has this quote tattooed on her body,” he explained. “I was very taken aback by that.” Frank, wearing a stunning fuchsia Lanvin dress, confessed that she hadn’t had a real brush with debauchery since her college days at Yale. “I was always at home reading, but I went to my fair share of naked parties,” she recalled. “My outfit was a purple feather boa and knee-high boots, and nothing else.”

Where

The usually white-walled Friedman Benda gallery in Chelsea had been refurbished to look like the kind of underground club usually found in Berlin or Ibiza. Wood panels and gold paint covered the walls, and there was a swirling centerpiece that the gallery had commissioned from the artist Agathe Snow (the widow of Dash), whose association with disco fever dates to her participation in a

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96-hour danceathon at the Whitney Biennial. Swansea also created a piece for the show: a large-scale portrait of nine dancers at the now-shuttered New York City spot Happy Valley.

When

The show is on view until Aug. 17, but the gallery's stint as a discothèque ended when the party did, at 9 p.m. The revelers, however, weren't ready to call it a night and headed to Le Bain, at the Standard hotel, to join forces with the club kid Susanne Bartsch's Tuesday night gay soiree. Beckley, the veteran conceptual artist, contrasted the swankiness of the spot with the simpler pleasures of Max's Kansas City. "A lot of younger guys used to go there for the chicken wings," he reminisced. "All you had to do was have a beer and you got dinner. I still have my loft in SoHo, where my friend Gordon Matta-Clark lived above me on the eighth floor. I was at the first dinner of EAT, which was free for the first several months. Rauschenberg was one of the cooks. It was like a soup kitchen for artists!"

Why

A Warhol print of Studio 54 V.I.P. passes on view reflects our fascination with nightlife. "Clubbing is about letting go of certain inhibitions," Albertz, the curator, said. "When you let go of certain feelings, we're a little bit truer to ourselves." He added, with a laugh, "Either that or this show is completely over-the-top and stupid." (A word to the skeptical: It's not.) Provost, the video artist, offered a different take: "Clubbing is fiction. It's all about dreaming." As a teenager, he said, he used to steal his parents' car to go immerse himself in house music, then new and revolutionary. The experience helped form his artistic process. "What I experienced in the clubs stayed with me and became my reality," he said.

"And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music" is on view through Aug. 17 at Friedman Benda, 515 West 26th Street; friedmanbenda.com

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