

Dinner at Deitch: It's All Legs and Breasts



Julie Atlas Muz, Jeffrey Deitch, and Bambi the Mermaid at the "Womanizer" opening night, January 6. *Photo: Deitch.com/Kristy Leibowitz*

Most dinner parties don't kick off with the hostess stripping to fishnets. But at Soho's tony Deitch Projects art gallery Saturday night, barely dressed was the dress code — for at least some guests. About 100 people turned out for a medieval-style banquet hosted by performance artist Julie Atlas Muz in honor of the "stars of the New York burlesque world," according Jeffrey Deitch. The food was Flintstone-size turkey legs, giant bowls of Brussels sprouts, ham hocks, and fruit, all served amid overactive fog machines. Seated at the groaning tables: a coterie of directors (Michel Gondry, Darren Aronofsky), art worlders (artists Jack Pierson, Brooklyn Museum head Arnold Lehman), plus stars Tatum O'Neal and Bambi the Mermaid. It was not your typical gallery party.

Burlesque's renaissance in New York has been going on since the turn of the century, but only

recently have some of its names made the crossover to the art world as performance artists. Powerhouse dealer Deitch — noted for staging Vanessa Beecroft's photos of naked models in the Guggenheim rotunda — is trying to give them a push into notoriety, and into the art market. His gallery show "[Womanizer](#)," dedicated to artworks by female performance artists, burlesque and otherwise, opened earlier this month. Muz, star of the Coney Island sideshow and formerly the Coral Room's topless mermaid, is its co-curator.

She launched the evening with a performance in which a demonic, disembodied hand ripped the clothes off her body and kept going. "Well, that's show biz," she told the clapping crowd. "Enjoy your meat!" Bands and more burlesque acts followed, ranging widely from gothic punk legends the Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black to ethereal Coco Rosie to Acapella Soul with "The Lion Sleeps Tonight." Midway through her act, Bambi — whose vivid photographs of a surrealistic Coney Island are "generating interest" at Deitch, says the gallery — slipped off her red panties and plopped them on her head. The event concluded with a performance sculpture by artist E.V. Day, best known for her piece of shredded bridal gowns displayed at Lever House last spring. Day offered two giant breasts alight with sparklers, sliced open to reveal a red-velvet cake. How else would you expect to get dessert? —*Alexandra Peers*