



## Inside Petra Collins and Madelyne Beckles's Scene-Stealing Performance

By Rain Embuscado | March 19, 2016



Petra Collins and Madelyne Beckles at Art Production Fund's 2016 gala.  
Photo: Courtesy of Patrick McMullan.

When it comes to performance art, context is everything.

Up-and-comers Madelyne Beckles and Petra Collins are well aware of this, and they leveraged their knowledge with masterful effect at last week's swanky Art Production Fund gala.

The artists, who have been collaborating since high school, aim to produce works that champion and reclaim spaces for women. Last September, for instance, Collins staged a 'girly room' for Refinery 29's anniversary exhibition. At Art Basel, the pair curated a show called 'Fuck Boi Funeral,' which they stated was a "room to feel comfortable and personal for girls."



Petra Collins and Madelyne Beckles at Art Production Fund's 2016 gala.

During the site-specific venture for the Art Production Fund, which the duo called Not Your Art Babies, the art world's crème de la crème encountered the artists feigning child-like naïveté—a fantasy accentuated by pacifiers, teddy bears, and pink leashes. To this observer, guests at the benefit seemed generally perplexed by the intervention—an intuition that the artists confirmed to artnet News.

In the first half of their two-hour-long performance, guests watched as the pair playfully lolled around behind a glass partition—a clever device that the artists employed to isolate themselves as objects of scrutiny.

“It’s cool because it went with the theme of the party, ‘Concrete Jungle,’” Collins said in a phone conversation. “I really felt like we were zoo animals and that’s what we wanted to express.”

“I found it interesting that there were a lot of older men who felt uncomfortable,” Beckles added, “because it kind of triggered this fetishization of women’s bodies and infantilization of women’s bodies that happens all the time. But they weren’t willing to deal with it directly.”

While the decision to enact infancy may seem a touch extreme, the artists knew that this radical reversion would be their greatest opportunity to dictate the nature of the gazes exchanged.

Beyond their unsettlingly seductive habitat of plush bedroom props and dimmed blue lights, a man the artists identified as Fred Beebe stood outside to greet the stream of spectators. Beckles explained that they instructed Beebe to act like a ringmaster.

At half past 7 p.m., the artists were led out of their proverbial crib and drawn by Beebe by their leashes into the cocktail hour’s spirited throng. Guests cleaved for the pair as Beebe, who continuously offered a flamboyant mix of pejorative remarks, led them to the stage.

“Everyone in the art world is your daddy,” he said to his charges. “Stand under my wing and I’ll teach you little art babies.”

When asked if they wanted temporary tattoos by artist Joyce Pensato, another artist-designed attraction of the evening, Beebe responded on their behalf: “They’re doing the Miley Cyrus thing,” he said. “Remember girls: Innocence first, then get loose.”

“What seemed to really disturb people,” Beckles volunteered via phone, “is the element of the leash. A couple people expressed that it made them uncomfortable.”

[https://instagram.com/p/BDFVBWwqn\\_m/?hl=en](https://instagram.com/p/BDFVBWwqn_m/?hl=en)



Madelyne Beckles, Petra Collins, and Fred Beebe at Art Production Fund's 2016 gala.

After the pair reached the stage, they undressed in full view and slipped into evening gowns, punctuating their symbolic transformation into ‘full-fledged women.’ By engaging in this private act in a public space, the artists underscored the irresistible reality that when it comes to women’s bodies, particularly in the art world, such mutually exclusive domains hardly ever apply.

Opportunities to deliver performances in this context are rare to come by, and the artists recognized APF’s directors, Yvonne Force-Villareal, Doreen Remen, and Casey Fremont, as key figures in providing the kind of space they needed for the piece to happen.

“They have to play into the game but they also want to support women artists,” Collins said. “They let us do that at their own Gala because they really understood. The art world is a crazy circus show, but they let us.”

The performance may have seen the duo pretending to be art babies, but don’t be mistaken: Collins and Beckles know exactly what they’re doing.