

The Creators Project

Bring Your Luck—Not Your Money—to this Art Auction
By Alina Cohen — Apr 24 2016



Monday night at SculptureCenter’s Lucky Draw, an eclectic group of art enthusiasts filtered through the Long Island City-based institution. During the last remaining hours of sunlight, they examined the hundreds of works that lined the walls. Various guests sported suits, tee-shirts, a Bernie sticker, and a jean backpack with American Spirits poking from the pocket. They all shared two accessories: a pen and a packet of papers. They scanned the walls, jotting down their favorite pieces. They’d all paid \$750 for their ticket to the event, and by the end of the night, each would get to take one of the pieces home. Whether the work was closer to the top or bottom of their lists was entirely up to the luck of the draw.

Executive Director and Chief Curator Mary Ceruti explained the origin of the Draw. “It was actually the brainchild of a couple of artists who worked at SculptureCenter back in the early 90s,” she told The Creators Project. “They conceived of it as a way to avoid the market forces of the auction, which are stressful to everyone in the art world and have only gotten more so over time.”

Different guests revealed their strategies for approaching the draw. “I actually have a four-point grading system,” said Jared Rosenberg. “There’s a lot of emerging artists I’m first made aware of here.” Kate Abrams had her eye on a Davide Balula piece. She had looked online beforehand at the works available but, she said, “You can’t really tell what the scale is until you get here. It’s sort of a mix of immediate aesthetic satisfaction and a little bit of research.”

While some guests continued to peruse, others ventured to the open bars at the back of the main gallery and outside and to the antipasto bar in the lobby.

Around 7:40, everyone sat down for the draw itself. Art consultant Lowell Pettit auctioned off the first four lots—the auction winner could select whichever piece he or she wanted. Finally, the draw itself began. One by one, Pettit selected names out of a raffle drum. The corresponding guests shouted out their preferred works.

The works themselves, despite the venue, ranged from sculpture to painting to photography to drawings. Aura Rosenberg's *Dialectical Porn Rock* might have won for best title, while most unusual media might have gone to Zerek Kempf for *Cheerios* or to Susan Smith for found French fry containers. The real stars of the night, the four lots won in the auction, included pieces by Mary Heilmann, Emily Sundblad, Frank Benson, and Camille Henrot.

As the night progressed, seats emptied as the lucky left. Napkins and cups littered the floors and the walls became bare as art handlers took down the claimed works. The unlucky sat in the white folding chairs, still waiting for their names to be called.