

The Great Life

George Christy

“The joint’s jumping,” smiled arty Ronit Weintraub (formerly of Fiorucci) to her husband on the bop-till-drop dancefloor, the joint being our \$22 million Museum of Contemporary Art. Conceived by architect Arata Isozaki on downtown’s Grand Avenue, the museum was christened last week with an art auction and dinner-dance to the liting music of maestro Peter Duchin, who led two bands. Boogieing with Ames Cushing to a string of Elvis Presley rock numbers (“Blue Suede Shoes,” “Jailhouse Rock,” “Heartbreak Hotel”), the evening’s executive producer Doug Cramer estimated the “take” as being \$1 million, but was corrected later by art dealer Margo Leavin, who explained that it was about \$750,000, since some artists received 50% of the bidding price. Over the past decade, modern art has become a status symbol, notably with movie and business moguls, whose offices and residences are designed frequently to accommodate it. What with interest rates being depressed, numerous investors are buying into art, hoping they’re building on their funds (although the most passionate collectors insist that one buys for love).

Peter Duchin’s bands played in the two main rooms, with the Step Sisters (Rita Valente and Patty Foley) harmonizing on retrophilia tunes from the ‘40s and ‘50s. “We had such a terrific response for tickets,” offered party co-chairwoman Lynda Palevsky, “that we had to open up the second room.” Her co-chairperson, Jane Nathanson, added, “Actually, we sent checks back to 300 people, since we couldn’t fit them in.” Dress was “extraordinaire,” with many of the gentlemen opting for dinner jackets and the women looking smartly stylish. Brooke Hayward (Mrs. Peter Duchin) wore an Oscar de la Renta purple jacquard silk gown from decorator Leonard Stanley’s costume collection which she accented with ruby and diamond earrings Peter had given her that were designed by the fantasy jeweler Fulco de Verdura. Brooke and Leonard mumbled

a bit about the dinner being late due to the auction, but when the guests finally did sit down, the menu was excellent, catered by the impeccable Rococo: a seafood medley, rack of lamb, raspberries in a chocolate shell, with the Sanford white wine pleasantly drinkable, the red wine not so drinkable, but no matter, there was ample white wine. Disney’s Jane and Mike Eisner, CAA’s Mike Ovitz, Sotheby’s president and auctioneer John Marion, Patti and Tommy Skouras sat with Doug Cramer, while New York art dealers Charlie Cowles and Irving Blum, Shirlee Fonda, art maven Dagny Corcoran, Barbara and Rospo Pallenberg, ace publicist Judy Hilsinger, Leonard Stanley joined Craig Johnson’s table (Craig being the design consultant for the party, having coordinated the tall bamboo stalk centerpieces dotted with white agapanthus that enlivened the bare rooms, which florist David Jones “warmed” by bringing in huge trees.

Tamara Asseyev, who worked hard to raise monies for the museum, was among the beautiful ladies, as were Luanne Wells in a Japanese print kimono with her husband

Frank (who’s co-authored a memoir, “Seven Summits,” about his mountain climbing experiences), Angela Rich with her husband Lee, Ginny Mancini with husband Hank, Felisa Vanoff with Nick, premier antiquaire Rose Tarlow in silvery Scaasi stripes — Rose came with Kalef Alaton. Art patrons Edie and Eli Broad, Leonore and Bernard Greenberg, Marcia Weisman with Sy Stuart, Keith and Bill Kieschnick, Bea and Phil Gersh, Roz and Henry Rogers, Merry and Bill Norris, Councilman Joel Wachs, celebrity dermatologist Arnie Klein and Penny Epstein, Joan and Fred Nicholas all were pleased with the work of Margo Leavin and Marcia Ross, who served as the auction’s co-chairpersons. During dinner, Dagny Corcoran chatted with Charlie Cowles about the high prices the art was bringing — a Chuck Arnoldi acrylic of molded paste and sticks was estimated at \$4,000 and went for \$5,000, a Billy Al Bengston went for \$7,750 (estimate was \$6,000). In all, 89 pieces were auctioned. Wearing an ooh-la-la shirred black Vicky Tiel dress, Dagny was touting visiting London architect Max Gordon, who’s redesigned her Chelsea Embankment flat (“finished it on time, and only

150 pounds over budget”), while Doug Roberts, an associate of Margo Leavin’s praised Jane Cantillon, who’s singing May 31st with the Marty Shapiro orchestra at the underground club, Power Tool, that’s in the Park Plaza Hotel in midtown (the old Elks building). MoCA director Richard Koshalek mixed, as did Jim Corcoran, Jessica Walter and Ron Leibman (who’ll co-star in “Tartuffe” next month at the Los Angeles Theater Center). San Francisco art dealer John Berggruen and his wife Gretchen, Barbi Benton and George Gradow, Doug Cramer III, who was with Alexandra Hedison (David Hedison is Doug’s godfather), Adrienne Horwitch of the gorgeous Rita Hayworth-red hair and her husband Elliott, Getty Trust’s Philippa Calnan, Jina and DeWain Valentine, Laddie John Dill, Nan and Gene Corman, Victoria Tennant, Dan Melnick, Norman Sunshine, Andrea and John Van de Kamp, Ava Ostern and Chuck Fries, Rod McKuen, Lois and Jerry Magnin, restaurateur Michael McCarty (in ocelot boots by Maud Frizon), architect Bob Ray Offenhauser and his wife Kathy, Sheldon Andelson, Joan and John Hotchkiss, Senator Alan Cranston, Conde Nast’s Eleanore Phillips Colt, Harper’s Bazaar’s Nancy Dinsmore, Alan Shayne with Paige Rense, who’s just sold her Angelo Drive residence in Beverly Hills. As for Paige’s experiences with the sale, Paige frowns on some real estate agents being “venal and immoral.” All concurred that the festive christening of MoCA with its pyramidlike domes was a proud evening, reflecting the frontier spirit of Los Angeles. MoCA is alive and kicking, and, like the Gold Rush, received a spankingly hearty welcome to the booming West.



CAA’s Michael Ovitz with Disney’s Michael and Jane Eisner, above, during Museum of Contemporary Art’s dinner-dance, which raised \$750,000; Ron Leibman and Jessica Walter, top right; Ames Cushing and the evening’s executive producer Doug Cramer, right; United Artists’ Lee and Angela Rich, below left



Dagny Corcoran and art dealer Charlie Cowles, above



The Step Sisters, Rita Valente and Patty Foley entertained, top left; MoCA’s vice chairman Fred Nicholas and wife Joan, top right; Marcia Weisman and MoCA director Richard Koshalek, above



Party co-chairperson Jane Nathanson, above left; Lynda Palevsky, Craig Johnson and Shirlee Fonda, above center; Dr. Arnold Klein and Judy Hilsinger, top right; Barry Krost, inset right; Joan and Allan Burns, right

Alan Berliner