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John Baldessari at the MOCA Fete: “What’s a Gala?”



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Marisa Tomei, Shepard Fairey, and more honor John Baldessari at the MOCA gala.



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Janelle Monáe

Photo: Billy Eganell / DEA.com

Staking its claim in the closely watched L.A. art scene, MOCA asserted its resurgence Saturday night at its annual gala. Presented by Louis Vuitton, the evening in the downtown L.A. Geffen Contemporary space honored longtime museum partner John Baldessari, whose dedication to the once-troubled institution remains steadfast. “We did a whole issue of *Visionaire* with him,” the magazine’s cofounder Cecilia Dean said of Baldessari. “He can make serious things really funny and make banal things really clever—he has an incredible way of seeing the world.”

During cocktails, guests including Marisa Tomei, Shepard Fairey, and Rosanna and Patricia Arquette walked their way through *Trinket*, the current exhibition of large-scale installations and performance and sculpture work by William Pope.L, before settling into the evening’s program. “Last year I was on this podium, we were just dating, it was a one-night stand,” the museum’s director, Philippe Vergne, said to the crowd of his first year with the institution. “This year we’re getting engaged, it’s just the beginning of a long relationship.”

As for his own long relationship with the museum, Baldessari shrugged off praise, instead giving a quick-witted impression of the pervasive gala culture. “When I moved to Los Angeles, I was talking to someone and I asked, ‘What’s a gala?’ And they said, ‘No, that’s *gay-la*,’” the 83-year-old artist told the crowd. “My attitude is, I was hoping we could have Louis Armstrong play in the background and you say ‘po-tay-to’ and I say ‘po-tah-to.’” Later, Janelle Monáe took the stage to perform a live set.

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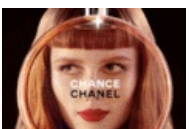
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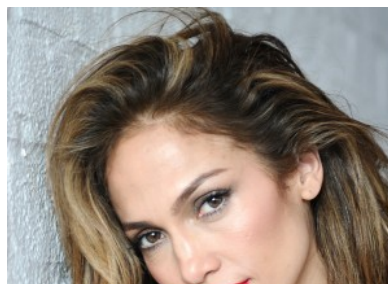


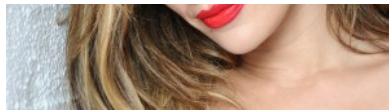
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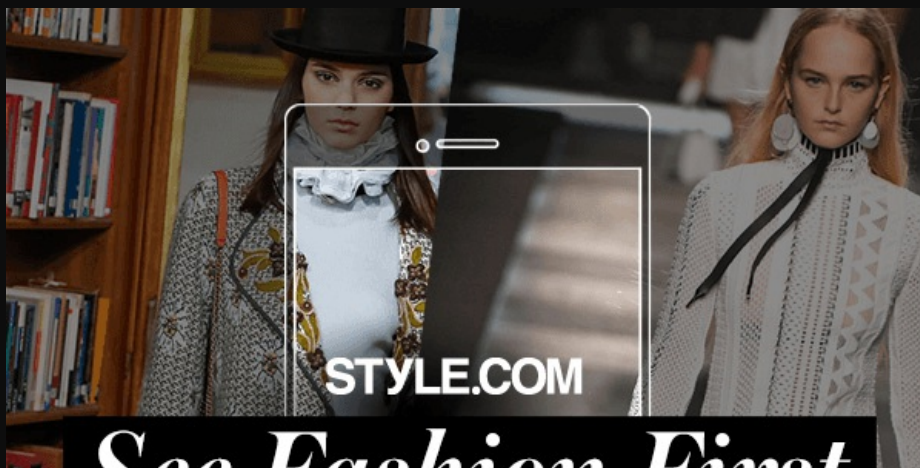
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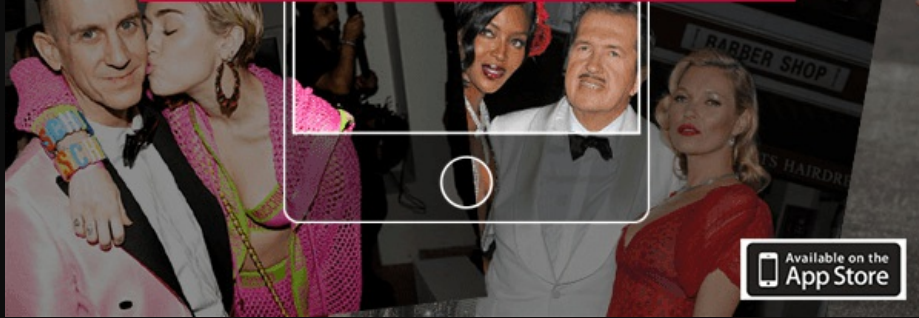
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