

Scene City

Taking Sides Over a Book on Women

By MELENA RYZIK

THERE were a few questions just waiting to be asked at the party for "Culo by Mazzucco," a book of artistic photographs that presents its models stark naked and bottom-first.

Russell Simmons, perched on the arm of a white leather sofa at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery on Sunday night, wondered if this was really his favorite perspective on women. "I mean, I'm a man," he said, so he understands the appeal.

The model sitting next to him, Loni Ayers, nodded. "I used to run track, so I'm kind of proud that I'm a model" with a notable posterior, she said. "It's rare."

That feature, however, was unavoidable at this party, where, between bites of gingered shrimp and shitake summer rolls, guests ogled oversized multimedia portraits of dozens of derrières. Some portraits recalled centerfolds; others were more artsy, with inlaid objects or text ("the world is no longer

Unveiling a project that took two years with women around the world.

flat"). A handful of the actual models were present, but even in their tight filmy dresses, they were hard to identify. "What are you going to do," whispered one partygoer, "ask them to lift up their skirts?"

"Culo" (slang for backside in Spanish) includes the rumps of Paris Hilton, Pamela Anderson and Sarah McLachlan, and was photographed by Raphael Mazzucco, best known for his work on Sports Illustrated swimsuit issues. Sean (Diddy) Combs is listed as an editor, but it was Jimmy Iovine, the Interscope Records mogul, who came up with the idea, via the Black-Eyed Pea will.i.am.

"He asked me for a million dollars for a video on his solo record, and I said no," Mr. Iovine said. "He called me nuts. So I gave it to him." Will.i.am returned with six hours of footage from Brazil, all of women's backsides. "I'm like, Will, this ain't no" video, but it is, he realized, a book. He offered the idea to Mr. Mazzucco (Ralphie, to him) and gave him free rein. The project took two years, and dozens of castings with bodacious women around the world.

"It's all art to me," Mr. Mazzucco said, standing by a portrait of Vildane, a model whose curves mirrored the violin attached to the print.

Across the gallery was Diddy, in a tuxedo shirt and jacket, jeans and unlaced combat boots, surrounded by bodyguards. He was greeting Ron Burkle, the supermarket mogul, who was surrounded by models. "I started to see that it was more than just a book about" booty, Diddy said guardedly, after Mr. Iovine nudged him to talk. Diddy called it artistic, but Mr. Iovine was less solemn. "You have to get the joke!" he said. "It's fun!"

Nello Balan, the restaurateur with a naughty streak, was on board. An image from the book — four naked women in a bed, legs entangled — graced the menu of his club, Nello Summertimes, in Southampton. Did that photo really make his customers want to eat?

"Oh yeah," he said. "So much."



A POINT OF VIEW
Clockwise from top: Sean (Diddy) Combs gestures as Jimmy Iovine, from left, and the fashion photographer Raphael Mazzucco watch during an event unveiling "Culo by Mazzucco," a book featuring photographs of the female backside. Mr. Mazzucco mingles with the crowd at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery. Guests check out the art on Sunday. Dr. Dre (second from left) at the gallery. The model Jessica White chats with Russell Simmons, right.

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