



## THE NEW YORK OBSERVER

### The Nether Regions of Chelsea



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By Andrew Russeth 10/11 6:35pm

The West Chelsea art district is rarely quieter than it is late on Sunday nights. The employees of the neighborhood's galleries, which operate Tuesday through Saturday, are in the middle of their weekends, and even most of the local clubs settle down a bit. However, this past Sunday, The Transom found West 26th Street, between 10th and 11th Avenues, abuzz with activity. Luxury cars—Cadillac Escalades, Mercedes-Benzes, a coveted Maybach—lined the street, and rap was spilling out of the second-floor Tony Shafrazi Gallery.

There was a velvet rope set up on the street in front of the gallery, and beyond it stood a phalanx of PR reps and security guards. Gliding past the welcoming committee, we ascended the stairs. At the top, we found, behind the front desk, emblazoned in bold capital letters, "CULO BY MAZZUCCO."

Like a few hundred young fashion and music types—a more racially diverse crowd than we had ever seen in a contemporary art gallery, truth be told—we were here to toast the unveiling of a new 248-page book of photographs by Raphael Mazzucco called, yes, *Culo by Mazzucco*. Culo? It's Italian for ass, we were informed. Let us be clear: Mr. Mazzucco delivered.

Past the red-carpet photo-op section, the galleries were hung with photographs of nude women—lithe model types—exposing their bottoms. They were in bed, facing walls and kneeling. Three stood on a beach, gazing off into the sunset. In one print, the woman twisted to face the camera, surrounded by scores of wine corks that had been affixed to the canvas. Many were splattered with paint—raspberry red, ocean blue and, perhaps most suggestive, white.

We caught up with Mr. Shafrazi, clad in a suit and tie, in one of the galleries. He is short and stocky and handsome, with a mane of curly white hair that extends to his shoulders. "Oh, I'm not the man to ask about that," the dealer told us when he asked how the show came about. "Ask one of the organizers." It was a great party, we told him, and he thanked us amiably, shuffling off as The Notorious B.I.G.'s "Mo Money Mo Problems" came on the stereo.

The Transom repaired to the bar, which was stocked amply with Ciroc, the eau de vie marketed by rapper Sean "Diddy" Combs, one of the executive editors of Mr. Mazzucco's book, with Interscope Records chairman Jimmy Iovine, who both arrived late in the evening. ("Interscope Records has always been a heat-seeking missile when it comes to shifts in popular culture," Mr. Iovine writes in the introduction to the book.) It turned out, Mr. Shafrazi, one of the art world's true eccentrics, who in 1970 defaced Picasso's *Guernica* at the Museum of Modern Art, writing "Kill Lies All" in red paint as he shouted "call the curator, I'm an artist"—was only providing his gallery for the evening.

As we examined more of the paint-splattered photographs of nude women, taking notes as we sipped a glass of Ciroc and soda, a tall-dark haired woman approached. "Are you press?" she asked. "I'm the art dealer this evening." We introduced ourselves. And though she then declined an interview request to discuss the show ("don't quote me, or I'll kill you," she laughed), she offered to introduce us to Interscope's lawyers. Unfortunately, they were busy, so we exchanged cards. "Call me tomorrow," she said. "Tell me which was your favorite piece."

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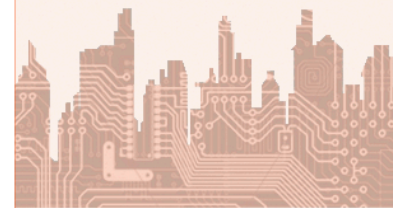
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