

Art Attack at Friedman Benda's Glamorous Nightclubbing Exhibition

by **Emily Colucci**



Stomping through a sweltering, sweat-filled afternoon, proving to myself that I am willing to gallery-hop through any weather –snow, rain or surface-of-the-sun hot, **Friedman Benda's** darkened, thankfully air-conditioned summer group show's ode to nightclubbing fun acts as a welcome mirage in the desert-like conditions outside. Named after a quote by philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, **the exhibition's** title *And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music*, while certainly more than a mouthful, undoubtedly perfectly portrays the decadence, freedom and celebratory obliviousness of the revelers, party goers and club kids represented in the show.

While the subject of the Friedman Benda exhibition, curated by Thorsten Albertz, is the club scene, the nightclubs reflected in the works are certainly not the Bridge and Tunnel-filled Meatpacking District clubs close to the Chelsea galleries. With works that range from **Bill Beckley's** nod to bathroom encounters to photographer Nan Goldin's images of drag queens and strippers to **Wolfgang Tillmans's** subversive and shocking imagery, *And those who were seen dancing...* reflects the spaces of drag balls, punk clubs, dives and even, Studio 54. Like the Eric Mitchell film of the same title, this exhibition is Underground U.S.A. and is definitely my kind of scene.



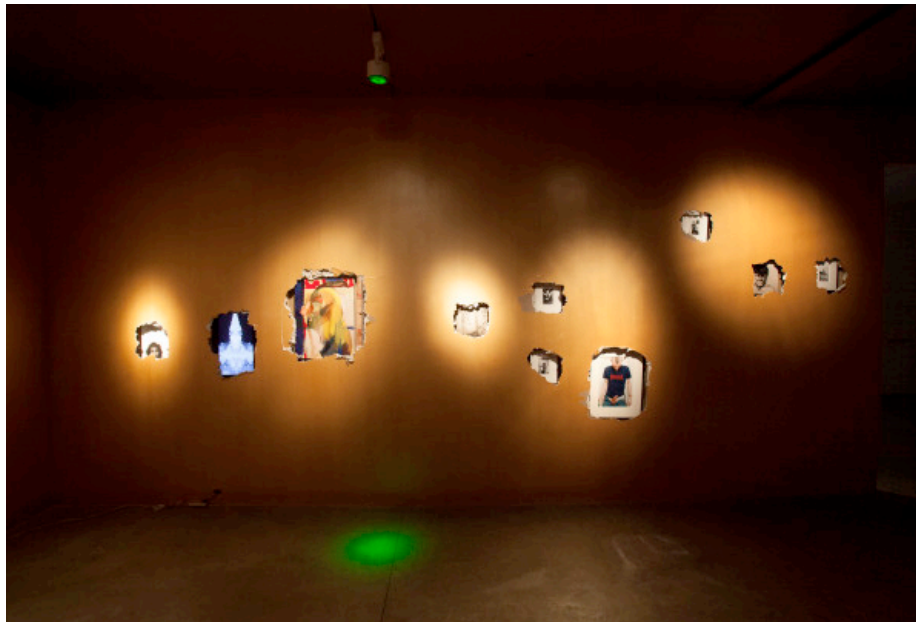
Immediately upon entering the main exhibition space, I notice Andy Warhol's repeated silkscreen painting of VIP complimentary drink tickets from the disco-haven Studio 54. Toying with the audience who would most likely be unable to get free drinks from this celebrated club, Warhol's painting reveals the exclusivity and the glitz of Studio 54, as well as labels Studio 54 as a Pop icon similar to his famous Campbell's soup can.

Like Warhol's painting, the sheer amount of painting in the exhibition positively surprises me. While I certainly anticipated the presence of well-known photographers such as [David LaChapelle](#) and [Andreas Gursky](#), I did not expect as much painting in the exhibition. One of my favorite painted works in the show is [Ena Swansea](#)'s stunning "it was late but they were not tired at all," which, with the subjects' fabulous clothing and striking poses, references the flamboyance, glamour and enchanting beauty of drag balls and voguing.

Another artist whose painted works fills the exhibition is German artist [Florian Süssmayr](#)'s tributes to punk rock icons and clubs. From '70s-haired Suicide band member Martin Rev to the shocking portraits of [GG Allin](#), who is possibly the most deranged, demented and derelict punk rocker to have ever lived, Süssmayr's monochrome portraits find the beauty in these obscenely tattooed punks.



Even though the amount of painting in *And those who were seen dancing...* stuns me, I also adore the other mediums represented in the exhibition such as Agathe Snow's wonderfully odd sculpture "Honey..." Constructed of found materials ranging from a blond wig to a disco ball, Snow's monumental sculpture looms large in the center of the dimly lit gallery space. Not only is the size of Snow's "Honey..." awe-inspiring, but the light reflected on the sculpture's tacky disco ball reflects through the entire exhibition, recalling Snow's epic and now iconic 96-hour dance party at the Whitney Biennial in 2008.



More than just the individual works in the exhibition, the actual installation of *And those who were seen dancing...* is equally fascinating. While the unique lighting gives the entire space the feel of a nightclub,

one wall in particular interests me with Nan Goldin's portraits of drag queens, Süssmayr's paintings and other smaller works wedged into holes in the gallery wall. Appearing as if either an overzealous dancer crashed into the wall at a party or an angry drunk took the wall to task, the works shoved into these holes question identity, sexuality, gender and, with Süssmayr's GG Allin, good taste, revealing the hidden worlds contained within nightclubs.

As I grudgingly step back into the excruciating New York City heat, I slip my headphones back on, pressing play on Iggy Pop's classic romantic nightclub anthem "Nightclubbing" and wander back down the street, feeling visually quenched by the decadent, sensational and deftly curated exhibition at Friedman Benda.

All images, unless otherwise noted, courtesy Friedman Benda and the artist

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