



PARTIES

Nick Cave Hosts an Art World Bash at the Park Avenue Armory

BY NOOR BRARA
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Photos: Da Ping Luo
Nick Cave and Beth Rudin DeWoody.

In 1991, a black taxi driver in Los Angeles named Rodney King was brutally beaten by a group of white police officers following a high-speed car chase. When footage from the incident was released—as it so happened, someone had filmed the entire episode from atop a balcony nearby—it quickly picked up media attention worldwide. The officers were tried on charges of excessive force and nearly all were totally acquitted; Los Angeles, in turn, exploded in a six-day period of civil unrest and violence that left thousands of people injured or dead.

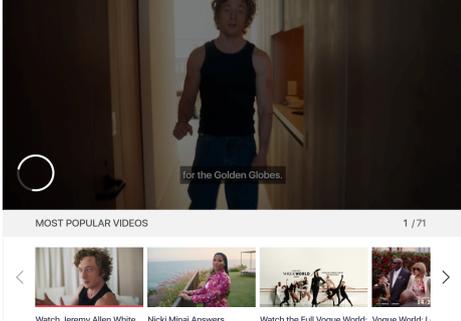


Somewhere in Chicago, the artist Nick Cave, was rattled to the core when he became aware of what had happened to King, the subsequent riots, and the fact that most of the officers had gotten off scot-free. "I remember thinking that my identity is really only protected in the privacy of my own home," he said. "That the moment I leave this space, I could be just another profile." In response, he created the first of what would become his claim to fame: a wearable sculpture he called a "soundsuit" that served as a sort of body armor or protection from the outside world. When donned, the wearer was totally concealed, and any physical indicators of race, gender, class, and sexuality were erased from view. Within this second skin, one was, essentially, freed.

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It comes as little surprise in 2018, then, that the Park Avenue Armory selected Cave as their artist-in-residence this season, and on Wednesday evening, the art world gathered there to ring in his new show, "The Let Go." Comprised of two parts, the first is a viewing of Cave's new series of soundsuits made from his signature color-laden materials of raffia, synthetic human hair, pipe cleaners, and other brightly toned, fuzzy fabrics, while in the second part, the suits are donned by dancers who invite viewers to take part in a performance set to music and a collective a town hall-style dance party. Cave's premiere performance took place in the Wade Thompson Drill Hall and filled the dark space with a 40-foot, rainbow-color Mylar sculpture that dazzled the audience beneath it as it swooped by on rods encircling the crowd. Here, a group of young vocalists from the Sing Harlem Choir—lead by Jorell Williams and Vy Higginsen—sang songs in gospel-style harmonies before a transfixed audience. Their reprise belted out the words "a change has come over me" as the dance performers assumed their soundsuits, and after about 20 minutes of what felt like a religious experience of calm—intended by Cave to create a moment of cathartic transfiguration in the mind and to, essentially, "let go"—the performers, singers, and space itself erupted into a full-on dance frenzy, culminating in a celebration of the collective differences of all who were there. The event opened for the audience to take part, turning, thereafter, into an '80s-inspired disco scene as a DJ took over for the singers. "Back in the day, the clubs felt like the only place I was truly safe and celebrated for being who I was born to be," noted Cave. "I am using 'The Let Go' as a way to share that feeling."

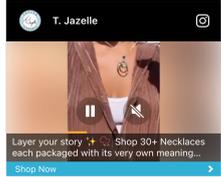
After the festivities and a special dinner, attendees—including artists Dustin Yellin, Hank Willis Thomas, and Rachel Rose, designer James de Givenchy, and playwright Lynn Nottage—made their way out into the summer night.



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