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Blind Faith

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Left: Artist Janko Suzuki and Gellin's Aji Janka. Right: Guggenheim curator Nancy Spector with artist Tino Sehgal. (All photos: David Velasco)

HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED that the Guggenheim's floor is patterned with circles? It had never occurred to me to examine it, but at the preview of Tino Sehgal's exhibition last Thursday, down was the first place I looked when prompted to fill in an empty signifier. "What is progress?" asked Kyla, the diminutive, wide-eyed interpreter of Sehgal's *This Progress* who approached me as I began to ascend the ramp. Maybe I was also compelled to drop my gaze because of the puritanical embarrassment I felt over the proximity of Kyla and her peers—all born, it seemed, this century—to *Kiss*, the necking duet in the rotunda's center. How much time did these children spend watching that languid performance of foreplay between turns of accosting visitors? "Oh, the ramp's wall is too tall for them to see over," a kisser later assured me.

Curator Nancy Spector argued that Sehgal's show, which lacks any objects, was the perfect way to spotlight the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright's building, in celebration of its fiftieth anniversary. She added that Sehgal's work fit with the jubilee theme of "art, architecture, and innovation." But innovation is the very value you're asked to doubt as you spiral upward, and the four interpreters—after the child, there's a teen, an adult, and a senior citizen—engage you in conversation about the Internet's effect on reading, the place of colonial history in France's national curriculum, manatees and agriculture, or whatever else is on their mind. If reaching the building's apex at the end of *This Progress* imparts a feeling of transcendence, it's soon erased by the need to go back down, a voyage that includes the unsettling sight of a nook full of old people, waiting for someone to talk to.



Left: Dealer Carol Greene with artist Craig Kalpakjian in the crowd at the Gellin performance. Right: Performa founder and director RoseLee Goldberg with CCA Wattis director Jens Hoffmann.

Gellin's exhibition at Greene Naftali opened that night, too. Another process work, it was as cluttered as Sehgal's was spare, autistic where his was social. From the plywood bleachers of a makeshift arena, we watched the artists erect floppy towers from their choice stash of poles, spools, toys, and power tools; it was like being spectators at a match of Chutes and Ladders. Gellin members Aji Janka, Florian Reither, Tobias Urban, and Wolfgang Gantner all wore blindfolds. But as befits the emphasis on hands over head, sensation over discernment, the blindfolds were the least conspicuous part of their costumes. Gantner's tighty-whities peeked out the hem of his baby-doll dress, and Janka wore flimsy sweatpants with a hole through the seat. ("I can't stop staring at his butt crack," a woman behind me blabbed.)

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The garb of their "assistants"—on this night Cecily Brown, Lucy Dodd Indiana, Amy Silman, and Jaiko Suzuki—was drabber, suited to the matronly duty of making sure the boys didn't draw blood as they screwed plush cats to broomsticks. Brown engaged Urban in a lengthy discussion of the relative merits of pigments to be poured on chunks of Styrofoam. Silman was content to be a gopher. "They'd just say, 'Get me a saw,'" she said.



The scene at Gellin's *Blind Sculpture*.

Throughout the evening, Gellin fueled themselves with mixtures of champagne, whiskey, and Coke—so even they expressed surprise that they were still lucid on arriving at Santos Party House to continue the festivities. Impressively, they didn't peek at the fruits of their labor before leaving the gallery. Urban vowed that he'd wait until their week in the gallery was up. "I never want to look at it," Janka said. At Santos, Diana Picasso, P.S. 1 director Klaus Biesenbach, collector Julia Stoschek, choreographer Maria Hassabi, and artists Cory Arcangel and Mika Rottenberg were among those who showed up to fete Gellin and catch a set by leftist rapper Tara Delong. But for most the real excitement was the presence of "actual" celebrities Beyonce and M.I.A. Greene Naftali director Jay Sanders was quick to note that the gallery was piggybacking on the party that the pop stars were there for, not the other way around. That would explain why said celebs declined to mingle, instead remaining largely invisible behind ropes, bouncers, and the club's dense darkness, to be talked about but not seen or photographed, as elusive and valued as a work by Tino Sehgal.

— Brian Drotkow

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