

Kanye West Previews 'Yeezus' at Art Basel Switzerland

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Kanye West

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The rapper holds an impromptu listening event for his upcoming sixth studio album, jokingly introducing himself as a "celebrity boyfriend."

"KANYE?!!!" The flood of near-identical texts came pouring in last night at around 10 p.m., when Kanye West announced that he would hold an impromptu preview of his album *Yeezus* at midnight at the Design Miami/Basel Fair. (By the performer's account, he had been on the prowl for Rick Owens furniture earlier in the day when the idea hit him to use the fair as a venue.) Hundreds of dealers, artists and otherwise – among them Art Basel director **Marc Spiegel**, Christie's **Loic Gouzer**, and new-media collectors **Pamela** and **Richard Kramlach** – dropped all other arrangements (including what was supposed to be the highlight of the evening, a surprise concert by

Solange at the Absolut Art Bar) and flocked to the Messeplatz hall, where they would mill around an open bar until West could pull together the last-minute prep work necessary to transform the empty first floor of the expo space into a concert hall. (He left a single Owens chair on stage for good measure.)

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After jokingly introducing himself as a "celebrity boyfriend," West reminded the crowd that "I got my start in art," rattling off the names of some admittedly prestigious art schools who had accepted West – that is, before the aspiring artist dropped out for lack of technical talent: "I realized I would never be a great visual artist of the world, and started to worry that I would end up working at an ad agency – no offense to anyone who does that."

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West dropped a fascinating monologue on the impetus for his album before unveiling the first two tracks, which he played straight from a laptop computer, bobbing over it as the songs played. Before West could release a third, he was interrupted by chants demanding that he sing live. West hesitated, then yielded, delivering an aggressive, a capella performance of "New Slaves," a potent song that climaxed with an anti-Montauk mantra: "I'd rather be in the Factory than the Maybach" and "F--- the Hamptons House!" While he seemed to be biting the hand that feeds him – West casually mentioned that he had been

dining with the Kramlachs an hour earlier – the singer concluded the performance by standing at the door, and shaking hands with everyone as they exited.

What should be shocking is that this all took place as mere accompaniments to Art Basel. What began in 1970 as a local trade fair has evolved into a week-long nexus of international culture and extravagant parties, where it is no stranger to spot Kanye than it is to rub elbows with the **Princess Eugenie** of York. The increasingly stratified system of VIP previews and openings now stretches over the entire week, with the first glimpse of Art Statements and Art Unlimited – sections of the fair dedicated to emerging artists and oversized work, respectively – starting already on Monday afternoon. (This for a trade show that used to open on Friday.)

The extra days leave dealers scrambling for places to dine – Basel isn't exactly a metropolis, after all. Chez Donati is usually a go-to, but this year **David Zwirner** stealthily booked it for the entire week. **Larry Gagosian** preferred to party in a former train station, while 303 Gallery, David Kordansky, Regen Projects and Eva Presenhuber were among the eight galleries who bonded together to host a barbecue at a hilltop dairy (where compliments on the beef muted as the cows starting trudging into the barn behind the guests.) Another option this year was Pret-a-diner, an itinerant "restaurant experience" that brings Michelin-starred chefs (in this case **Tim Raue** and **Oliver "Ollysan" Lange**) to pop-up venues around Europe. In Basel they chose an Elizabethan church, whose Gothic architecture and stained glass windows struck a moody setting when, at the stroke of 11 p.m., the space converted into the temporary site of Silencio, the Paris-based club still trading on its (mostly titular) ties to **David Lynch**. Silencio had to go head-to-head with nightly rowdiness at the Kunsthalle's Campari Bar, as well as **Emmanuel Perrotin's** annual party with Parisian nightlife staple Le Baron on Das Schiff, a multidecked boat docked on the Rhine. Predictably sweaty, smoky and just the right amount of slutty, the Francophile guests gave it their all on the dance floor (with some help from The Gramme), periodically retiring to the top deck for fresh air.

STORY: Kanye West Reveals 'Yeezus' Collaborators

Speaking of fresh air, returning this year was the Absolut Art Bar, who followed up last year's installment – designed by **Jeremy Deller** – with a tripped-out, '70s-style lounge, courtesy of **Mickalene Thomas**. ("It's like having a party in Mickalene's brain," as Lehmann Maupin director **Courtney Plummer** described it, though apparently the artist had been angling to recreate her mother's old house.) Wednesday night, a covert operation brought Solange to the club to play for a room of less than a hundred lucky listeners, who were all sworn to secrecy.

Hands-down one of the glitziest affairs was also held Wednesday, at the stately Kunstmuseum, where **Tina Brown**, **Daphne Guinness** and **Dasha Zhukova** hosted an "intimate dinner" preceded by a conversation between Brown and artist **Theaster Gates**, whose homegrown, Chicago-based activism ("I prefer to think of it as neighborliness") has rocketed him into the spotlight. The evening drew art world royalty like **Eli Broad**, **Peter Brant**, Gagosian, **Jay Jopling** and **Alberto Mugrabi**, as well as some actual royalty – the **Princess Alia Al-Senussi** and **Prince Abdullah Al Turki** – and a younger crowd of scenesters: **Vladimir Restoin-Roitfeld**, **Olympia Scarry**, **Vito Schnabel**, **Adam Weymouth** and **PC Valmorbidia**. Architect **Fernando Romero** and **Soumaya Slim** sipped champagne on the stairs, while **Naomi Campbell's** ex, the dreamy Russian **Vlad Doronin** chatted away in his seat next to **Stephanie Seymour** (who thankfully need not worry about her contracts getting mysteriously canceled overnight). When the news about West's surprise performance hit, Manila-based collector **Robbie Antonio** (whose pride rests in an ever-growing collection of portraits of himself from jaw-droppingly diverse artists like **Damien Hirst**, **David LaChapelle** and **Marina Abramovic**) had this to add: "I tried to commission Kanye once, but he was going to cost me even more than **Anselm Kiefer**."

Perhaps the most shocking twist of all, however, is that the week isn't even halfway through. The next few days still hold plenty in store, with the annual nocturne at the Beyeler and a Black Woods getaway dinner, hosted by **Maria Baibakova** and **Alexandra Chemla**. Now the only question is, who has time to see the art?