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CRATE MINDS
From left, Alexis Topik, Giles Deacon, Rory Crichton, Patrick Brill, Tom Collins, David Kahn, Will Broome, Pablo Picci, John Russett, David Thorp and David Waddington
Art storage crates, from Williams & Hill Forwarding Ltd. Table and chairs, from Ikea. 27cm plate, £33; 18cm plate, £22; teacup, £24; tea saucer, £21; teapot, £70; cereal bowl, £25, all by Will Broome, for Wedgwood, from G&K Contemporary. 'Chair II' (upside down on crate), £170, by Michael Thonet, from SCP
For atcockists, see Resources, page 234



Royal flash

London's Royal Academy is lighting up its dark spaces with performance-dining and pole-dancing

PHOTOGRAPHY: LEON CHEW WRITER: DIANE VADIMO



At 11 am in an unused corner of 6 Burlington Gardens, at the back of the Royal Academy of Art in Mayfair, London, restaurateur Pablo Flack is trying to explain how this vast, austere room will soon accommodate his radical take on that most modern of metropolitan hang-outs, the museum restaurant. Flack and his partner David Waddington – the creators of *Bistrotheque*, way east of here in Bethnal Green, and of 2006's much-publicised and somewhat over-ambitious pop-up eatery, *The Reindeer* – are planning a second temporary exercise in dining theatre. They are calling it *Flash*.

Flash's 80-day residency will coincide with GSK Contemporary, the Royal Academy's inaugural season of shows by new and emerging artists including René Pollesch, Olaf Nicolai and Catherine Sullivan. The show debuts 31 October, with *Flash* opening the following day.

'*Bistrotheque* seemed like the obvious partner. They'd done the pop-up thing with *The Reindeer*, they're in the heart

of the East End, and they understand contemporary art and how it functions,' says David Thorp, the GSK Contemporary curator, well regarded for his pioneering work with PS1 in New York and Platform China in Beijing. 'From every point of view they were ideal collaborators.'

The partnership with the RA is a huge move up and out of east London for Flack and Waddington. Flack, a reedy 35, was born in Yorkshire and originally came to London to study at the London School of Economics, before creating the House of Jazz fashion label with designer Hazel Robinson. He then partnered with fellow Yorkshireman Waddington to take over the *Bricklayers Arms* pub in Shoreditch. Waddington, 37, also has a background in fashion, as a Central St Martins 'trained' menswear designer.

In the *Bricklayers Arms*, the pair created a play den for the nascent East End fashion-art nexus. In *Bistrotheque*, opened in 2004, they would provide a dining room and cabaret for a scene

ARTY MEALS

Restaurateurs David Weddington (left) and Pablo Flack (right) in the space that will become their concept pop-up restaurant, *Flash*, in the Royal Academy of Art's Mayfair residence, as part of the RA's new season of exhibitions. GSK Contemporary

growing up and getting big ideas. It soon became a rallying point for the East End's new creative elite, a select squad of whom Flack and Waddington have recruited to realise their vision for *Flash*.

We bought them all together for a preview tea party in the space they'll soon invade. Today's assortment of designers, artists and illustrators come chiefly from east London. There's former British Fashion Designer of the Year Giles Deacon, who's designing the restaurant's chandelier. 'I've made them at home with bits of wire,' he says. 'I quite like doing them as a nice gift for friends.' Chef Tom Collins has been sent off to change into his work clothes; fashion illustrator Will Broome sits quietly in the hallway, his drawings – familiar from his work with Marc by Marc Jacobs as well as a Topshop capsule collection – now adorn the signature Wedgwood White collection that will be used at *Flash*.

Illustrator and textile designer Rory Crichton, whose clients include Prada, »

Gucci and Louis Vuitton, explains how his contribution to the space will involve depictions of cutlery-wielding octopuses and cabbage rabbits. What's a cabbage rabbit? 'A rabbit with a cabbage for a dress,' he says plainly. 'Something daft – some daft surreal images, like I normally do with Giles.'

Fulham resident Broome is the only non-East Ender. 'People always think I live in a wigwam in Hoxton, but I don't,' he says. 'I do go to east London, but just to sort of laugh at people and point at them.'

Flash's infiltration of the RA – the most venerable of arts organisations – is in some ways just the latest display of east-west creative détente and trade in London. Mayfair galleries have, of course, long shown the work of east Londoners (east London is Europe's most significant artistic ghetto of long standing), but four years ago the arrival of Comme des Garçons founder Rei Kawakubo's Dover Street Market, the six-storey celebration of the new and the next, heralded a revivification for Mayfair, ironically an intake of invigorating air from the grimy, but ever so fashionable, East End.

The creative cognoscenti followed suit, with Marc Jacobs setting up shop in nearby Mount Street in 2007. After decamping to Hoxton in 2000, White Cube returned to the area six years later, with Jay Jopling opening a new space in Mason's Yard (White Cube now has two iconic galleries in the twin poles of the London art scene). Mayfair is hip again. And in a way that it never has been before.

This art-minded advance on the city's most rarefied spaces is also at the heart of Flash. And Flack makes no apologies for this temporary, for now, westward drift. 'We all – whatever our business and skills and talents – want to do it in Mayfair,' he says. 'I don't know anyone from the East End who wants to be stuck there.'

Indeed he sees it as part of a broader re-invigoration of the cultural 'establishment'. 'It's why we have Will drawing on Wedgwood. It is the idea of heritage subverted by youth. It's not that we want to do away with the heritage – you just want to keep the quite cool bits and just add some other bits.' Architect David Kohn, an ex-associate at Caruso St John Architects and now running his own operation, walks the perimeter of Flack's planned room-within-a-room, which is demarcated by six slender white columns, Victorian additions to what was once a two-storey library. Flack's room will be bordered by five-metre-high stacks of art crates, opened to reveal works by, among others, Crichton, London painter Simon Popper and artist Alexis Teplin, formerly a Royal Academy Starr Fellow.

Each artist was asked to design a separate layer, from Crichton's »



FLASH LIGHT

Above, Giles Deacon's sketch for the restaurant's spectacular chandelier, which will be made with peridot-green Swarovski crystal
Top: Patrick Brill, Giles Deacon and Rory Crichton

BEEF BREW

On the menu at Flash, but maybe just for the culinary curious, is a drink that has only seen the light of day within the Academy walls. The Royal Academicians and the Red Collars (the officials who hold the vault keys) gather in April each year for the ritual selection of submissions for the Summer Exhibition (an institution since 1769). Central to the ceremony is the Beef Tea, served from an urn and laced with sherry. According to 19th-century British cookery oracle, Mrs Beeton, beef tea is a restorative drink for those with inflammatory diseases, and is made by boiling a pound of boneless beef in a quart of water and a teaspoon of salt, for half an hour. In 1886, when John Lawson Johnston created Bovril – an instant beef tea – the drink gained mass appeal. In the early days Napoleon's troops drank it; by the 20th century it was consumed by football fans to ward off chills in the stands. Now it has all but died out, but the east London gastronomists behind Flash are bringing it out from behind the Academy's closed doors, and serving up the recipe among the cream teas and the ham hocks. **Emma Moore**



octopuses to Teplin's birds, up on top. The natural elements reference the fact that 6 Burlington Gardens was once a garden, when Burlington House was first constructed as a speculative stately home in 1667. Burlington Gardens would be built atop its namesake in 1870, as one of the University of London's first buildings, Kohn says. This room would be used as a library until 1900, when the collection was transferred to South Kensington. From 1970 until 1998, 6 Burlington Gardens served as the home for the British Museum's Museum of Mankind and for the past few years as a wing of the Royal Academy, which has occupied the adjacent Burlington House since 1867.

Flash's unusual ad hoc design will register, as Kohn suggests, as an irreverent play on the room's classical architecture, as well as Flack's theatrical experiment – but perhaps not as an art installation, as it's described in materials promoting the restaurant. 'I call it a set, but other people have called it an installation. We're creating quite a controlled little world, and in that way it's very similar to an installation in a gallery,' says Flack.

The idea for Flash appeared to Flack, as a sort of epiphany, just as his last pop-up experiment was winding down. 'It was the last night of *The Reindeer*, and I remember walking up the main aisle – I just saw a room in a room, with a big chandelier, almost like a film set, so you'd walk onto the set, and that was it,' Flack

CHEF D'OEUVRE

Chef Tom Collins has magicked up an eight-starter, eight-main course and six dessert menu, stars of which include: roast quail, lardons, pecans and apple with maple syrup jus; roast cod with confit fennel and sauce vierge; and fig and mascarpone custard with honey millefeuille

TOM COLLINS WITH A TWIST

Tom Collins, 28, is Flash's executive chef. After first working the kitchen of Shoreditch's Electricity Showrooms, under the entrepreneurial David Waddington, he moved in 2004, at the tender age of 23, to Waddington and Flack's new, too-cool-for-signage backstreet restaurant, *Bistrotheque*. Here Collins has developed a laidback melding of modern British and old-school French bistro. Earlier this year, Waddington and Collins took in a five-day tour of California's gastronomic shrines, studying the West Coast's take on European culinary classicism. 'It's the art of employing powerful flavours with a delicate touch, and layering high-impact tastes,' says Collins. When east London art-world gastronomy moves west, a raising of the bar is to be expected. 'Flash food will be much more labour-intensive, and aesthetically more refined,' affirms Collins. Lunch and dinners will be separated by an interlude, when the Josiah Cream Tea, named after Josiah Wedgwood's china company which is celebrating its 250th anniversary in 2009, will be served, on wares customised by Will Broome. It's obvious Collins intends to measure up to the best of the west. **EM**
Main course prices range from £14.50 to £22. www.bookflashnow.com

says. 'I sort of went around to everybody like, "It's going to be called Flash." They just thought I was totally mad.'

When the restaurant is constructed, the art crates will outline an interior dining space; with a makeshift back-of-house, including a prep kitchen on the outside. Guests will essentially walk through busy preparation areas on their way to tables. 'The concept is that we've turned a restaurant inside-out, so you kind of see the guts when you walk in,' Flack says. 'People will walk into the back-of-house, where people are making drinks, and there's a prep kitchen – you'll think, "I've obviously walked through the wrong door";' Flack says. 'But then you'll walk onto the set, where the atmosphere is totally controlled. People won't notice it, but they'll feel a sense of calm.'

'Calm' was not the operative byword at *The Reindeer*, 2006's 23-day wonderland of snow-covered fir trees and illuminated log cabins, with Deacon-designed plates and Christmas crackers created by *Pop* magazine editor Katie Grand. Its 310 seats were some of the most desirable in town, even if, Flack now concedes, the overwhelming hype finally did the restaurants few favours. 'We ended up doing a lot of Christmas parties and, to be honest, they're not pleasant,' he says. 'There's so many people, and they're usually drunk and most people don't even want to be there. The whole thing was my Christmas fantasy – this kind of wintery Narnia, rather than tinsel baubles. But we'd be there with 75 real trees covered in snow, and log cabins and everything's aglow, and you'd get people going, "It's just not very Christmassy";' Flack says. 'You'd just want to kill them.' Lessons learned, Flack and Waddington have refined the pop-up formula for Flash, which will offer only about 100 places, down from *The Reindeer*'s 310; the great majority of tables will seat four or fewer, and many will be held back for last-minute guests. 'We wanted to do it much more for our natural crowd, which is the art and fashion world,' Flack says. 'With *The Reindeer*, everybody had booked months in advance but the people you really want to be there – because they make the restaurant fun – they make decisions at six o'clock. We want more of that spontaneity, so when people who are in the exhibitions come by and ask if we have a table, we can say yes.'

There seems to be an unusual synergy between Flash and the GSK exhibitions that will appear around the restaurant. GSK and Flash together represent a rather forceful step onto new ground for the Royal Academy. 'The Flash launch party was unbelievable,' says Kohn, of the June event that celebrated the project. 'There's the director of the Royal Academy, the >>



head academician, the great and the good – and then the lights went out and in burst four trannies singing *Bohemian Rhapsody*, carrying torches. I can't quite believe this is happening in the Royal Academy – and that they're brave enough to take what is clearly a risk.'

If he's at all anxious about that risk, GSK curator Thorp is hiding it well, and emphasises that this is RA-endorsed reform, not revolution. 'The RA is based around and philosophically run by artists,' he says. 'There's a huge cross section of views, but these are living artists, who are making work now, and who understand the importance of art and its living, contemporary relevance.'

Thorp's tour of the GSK galleries first passes by several areas to be taken over by the art space Temporarycontemporary, run by curators Anthony Gross and Jen Wu. The space will include a shop installation by London-based artist Patrick Brill, who works as Bob and Roberta Smith. 'The Bob Shop' will feature both his work and contributions from other artists Brill has recruited.



TABLEAUX MANNERS

Left, a spontaneous performance by artist Spartacus Chetwynd, who will exhibit in the areas occupied by Camberwell-based art space Temporarycontemporary
Below, the RA's GSK curator, David Thorp

'It's going to feature art people can buy that can cure all ills,' Brill promises. 'These will range from drawings to cure the common cold to badges and T-shirts and various objects to cure the world.' For his part, Brill views the GSK programme as an evolution of earlier RA forays into contemporary art, like the infamous 'Sensation' show of Charles Saatchi's collection in 1997. 'Sensation', in its way, was a very conservative show,' Brill elaborates. 'I think this approaches contemporary art in a much more contemporary way – this is going to be a giant art funfair. Perhaps they're just a bit chilled out now.'

Thorp continues on from the Temporarycontemporary spaces to the galleries that will show work from the 'Molten States' programme, which will take up the first six weeks of the exhibition. He's clearly charged by the prospect of bringing artists such as Pollesch and Nicolai into the RA. 'Pollesch is huge on the continent, but he's never shown in the UK,' Thorp says, marching through the space where Pollesch will mount a three-night, German-language work that cuts evenly between an experimental theatre piece and an art performance. Nicolai's work will be installed in a darkened adjoining gallery. 'It's called "Lonesome Spot", and it's one column, from floor to ceiling, with a light on it that moves up and down, round and round. It's based on the idea of a pole dancer,' Thorp says. The show's second half, 'Collision Course', focuses on apocalypse-themed pieces, with a separate tribute to William Burroughs.

'We've got all these different people inhabiting all these different spaces; that's what Bistrottheque is doing, taking control of the situation,' says Thorp, ending his tour in front of the two-storey stairwell where Rémy Markowitsch's 'Onion Options' will hang in just over two months time. Later that afternoon the GSK artist Lali Chetwynd (see W*93) – also known as Spartacus – makes a pre-emptive intervention in Burlington Gardens. Invoking both tea parties and Helmut Newton, Chetwynd and a half-dozen collaborators create a number of tableaux. Chetwynd goes naked, bar a pair of high heels, while her cohorts appear in elaborate costumes – almost, but not quite, appropriate for a formal occasion befitting the surroundings. (A lipstick man in a leopard-print dress and gold sandals is a little outré.) 'I quite like the idea of the Royal Academy being squatted by all these artists – I think it's actually a very convenient way to think of the structure of this building,' says Thorp. 'It's sweet, this idea of the East End taking over the West End. I like it.' ★
www.royalacademy.org.uk