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SUMMERTIME BRUCE: WATERMILL CENTER'S SUMMER BENEFIT WILL FEATURE BRUCE HIGH QUALITY FOUNDATION

BY *M. H. Miller* POSTED 05/31/16 1:33 PM

The summer benefit at the Watermill Center, Robert Wilson's "performance laboratory" inside an old Western Union research facility in Watermill, New York, is always one of the stranger evenings on the gala circuit. Serving as both a black tie dinner and a showcase of experimental art presented by residents in the center's international summer program—a group of artists, writers, directors, actors, and dancers who live and work at the center over the course of the summer—the benefit plays host to a number of often intense pieces on the Watermill grounds before a crowd of celebrity guests in evening wear. Last year's event included a performance where a masked figure struck a large monolithic sculpture with a sledgehammer and tossed smoke bombs into the forest surrounding the center. A few years back, a group of shirtless men threw nails at another performer, who was sheathed in a magnetic suit of armor.

This year's event is a little different, and will feature a collaboration between the Watermill residents and New York-based collective Bruce High Quality Foundation. Seth Cameron, BHQF's president, described the piece as a "story cycle" called "As We Lay Dying," comprising a series of sculptures, videos, and sound pieces. "There are four stories that we've written that we're using as the basis for large-scale, I guess you could call it installation," Cameron said. BHQF runs an art school in New York and has held massive survey shows conceived as an alternative to the Whitney Biennial, called the Brucennial. Their own work is produced sort of by committee, and during their early years (they formed in 2004), the identities of the collective's members were, officially at least, a closely kept secret.

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“It makes a lot of sense for us, because we work collaboratively even on the smallest scale,” said Cameron. “The smallest objet d’art has a lot of hands involved.”

The Watermill residents have collaborated with artists in the past for the gala—including Ryan McNamara and the Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black—but never quite on this scale, according to Elise Herget, Watermill’s director of special events. The gala usually comes together off the cuff, during the weeks the residents are living at the center, so that “you never know until maybe the month before what’s going to happen at the gala.” The members of BHQF will be living at Watermill for two weeks, during which most of the piece will fall together, but that there’s even a cursory idea right now means there’s more advanced planning than usual.

“As in most years with our gala, it sort of always starts with Bob Wilson,” Herget said. “He works in a very different way. He’ll just all of a sudden come up with some grand scheme or grand idea, and depends on our curator to pull things together.” She said this year Wilson wanted to plan out an installation instead of having things just fall into place at the last minute. BHQF was proposed as a participant one afternoon when Wilson was having lunch with the writer Bob Colacello. Wilson is no stranger to collaboration, of course. As a director, he’s worked with certain artists and performers for decades, and his stage work is often produced with a coauthor, from varied figures including Philip Glass, Christopher Knowles, and Tom Waits.

“So much in the way we’re approaching the project is very much inspired by how Bob has worked for much longer than we have, collaboratively with so many different artists, and thinking very differently about how to create a story,” Cameron said. “Real collaboration, where you don’t always know what’s gonna happen.” He added, somewhat coyly: “We hope he likes it.”

In an email statement, Wilson said simply, “The Bruce High Quality Foundation is the most exciting collective of young artists I know today.”

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