

# HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

MUSEUMS

## MoMA Breaks for Recess

by **Howard Hurst** on November 30, 2012



*Recess at MoMA (click to enlarge) (all photos by Carly Gaebe/Steadfast Studio, courtesy MoMA)*

wandering around the museum after hours while provided with a new context in which to view its tried and true collection.

The result was entertaining, although also a bit much. At first I lingered with friends amid the throng of beautiful people in the lobby, drinking beer and listening to a DJ set by Cory Arcangel's music group, Title TK. Between the flock of blonde, stockbroker-looking dudes, the colored neon lights, and the music, I felt mildly like I was in the Meatpacking district. If it weren't for the incredible surroundings, I probably would have turned back.

I have to be honest: as a child, I wasn't a big fan of recess. All is well and good when you're running around the dodge ball court — until someone gets pegged in the face. Don't get me wrong, I've always been a big fan of capture the flag, and who doesn't love a little fresh air, but that shit can be brutal. That's what the word conjures for me, at least: 100 wild young children running around, consumed by the wild thrill of unmonitored free time. It just always seemed so stressful.

The Museum of Modern Art's most recent [Pop Rally](#) seems to have not only borrowed the name of that crazy time between lunch and spelling class, but also re-created the feeling associated with those afternoons. For the event, MoMA partnered with [Recess](#), a Soho workspace that lends its storefront space to artists for monthlong projects that focus on process, performance, and audience interaction. The nonprofit was given [free range](#) in the museum's lobby and its 4th- and 5th-floor gallery spaces. I couldn't resist the idea of



*John Miserendino, "Stalking Balzacs"*

After a couple of minutes, I noticed [John Miserendino's](#) "Stalking Balzacs." His troupe of rubberized, variously sized reproductions of Auguste Rodin's iconic sculpture glided eerily around the floor, always in relation to one another. Their remote-controlled, robot ballet threw the original object into a strange light. I became lost in thought, wandering through a bizzaro KB Toys in my mind, where bronze sculptures tangoed in a feedback loop between real and reproduction. Archangel and gang's music wasn't unpleasant; in fact, in the context of this performance, it was well suited. The problem, and the reason I don't often go to openings anymore, is that the art seemed constantly overshadowed by the polite chatter of the well-dressed party guests.

Determined to do this thing right, I took the escalators to the 4th floor. While rediscovering many of my favorite paintings in the partially empty exhibition halls, I began to hear that slightly haunting tone of brass instruments. Something about the tune was disjointed and lonesome.

Also on the 4th floor was [Julia Sherman's](#) live photo-shoot re-creation of Picasso's iconic painting "Les Femmes d'Alger (O.K. R. M.)." The naked model posed according to the artist's instructions while visitors walked around the makeshift set and talked with the otherwise occupied artist. While I thought this project was particularly engaging and provided the audience with renewed interest in a tried and true museum piece, I'm not sure if the rest of the performances were quite as effective. This is not because of the works themselves but their

Perhaps the most pointed and interesting intervention was [A.K. Burns](#) and [Katherine Hubbard's](#) "Poetry Parade for a Permanent Collection." For the piece, 12 performers, including the artists, traipsed around the 4th and 5th floors reading poems and quoted texts in front of a variety of paintings and sculptures. The dissonance between narrative and object ostensibly provides an added layer of meaning and additional lens through which to view the work on display. Unfortunately, feeling the pressure of the crowd and the variety of other performances, I didn't have the fortitude to track down many performers.



*One of Galería Perdida's horn players*

Also on the 4th floor was [Julia Sherman's](#) live photo-shoot re-creation of Picasso's iconic painting "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon." The naked model posed according to the artist's instructions while visitors walked around the makeshift set and talked with the otherwise occupied artist. While I thought this project was particularly engaging and provided the audience with renewed interest in a tried and true museum piece, I'm not sure if the rest of the performances were quite as effective. This is not because of the works themselves but their inability to compete with the rather socially aggressive surroundings.

Galería Perdida project, for example, was interesting: it made me focus on the carefully planned vistas, stairways, and glass windows dotting the museum, perhaps the kindest thing an artist has done for the museum's architect since the building opened in 2004. The problem was how difficult it became to focus through the crowds. It seemed like artists and organizers didn't necessarily make use of the tension that crowds and booze create, but rather ignored it. While the performances I saw were interesting, I left slightly bemused, wishing I had been rocked in the face. Not everything has to be an Andrea Fraser performance, but I had hoped for something a bit less polite and well behaved.

*Pop Rally's [Recess at MoMA](#) took place at the Museum of Modern Art (11 West 53rd Street, Midtown, Manhattan) on Saturday, November 10, from 8 to 11pm.*