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Art Is Long, Book Parties Are Short

By CAMPBELL ROBERTSON

Now, where were we? Ah, yes, we were at JANN WENNER's house on the Upper West Side for a party celebrating "Raising Boys Without Men," a book about single and lesbian mothers raising boys.

Two men wearing dark suits and earpieces stood discreetly at the entrance, if standing out on the sidewalk in the sweltering heat wearing dark suits and earpieces could be considered discreet.

Right inside the entryway were two little fat sculptures. FERNANDO BOTERO's, we later found out.

"The rooms are kind of small," sniffed one guest. Oh, but these parties are not, of course, about petty voyeurism. They are about celebrating the written word, honoring those who labor to chronicle life's struggles and successes.

So we approached the author, PEGGY F. DREXLER, and asked her if the idea of her book meant that fathers were redundant.

"Absolutely not," said Ms. Drexler. "Men are very, very important to boys."

Yes, yes. Over there, out of the corner of our eye, those CHAIRMAN MAO silk-screens by WARHOL. There had to be, like, a dozen of them.

"We know now that boys are hard-wired to be boys through science," Ms. Drexler was saying, "and we also know -"

Wow, is that a FRANKENTHALER?

"- it's more important how many times you sit down and have dinner with your kids than the number or gender of parents at the dinner table."

And that giant religious triptych over there, what's that thing cost? We approached Mr. Wenner, who was in conversation with other guests.

"It's from the 14th century. From Alsace-Lorraine," he explained, nonchalantly. "I bought it at auction many years ago and I found out after the fact that it came from the HEARST estate."

In walked a troubled-looking BETTE MIDLER, who is scheduled to sing tonight in Madison Square Garden at a benefit for Hurricane Katrina victims.

"Every day I wake up I've been having panic attacks for - I shouldn't give all this away - panic attacks for a week, and I'm so upset," she said. Above her hung a DIEGO RIVERA painting of an opera singer. "I'm upset about the diaspora, but I'm also terribly upset about the environmental impact this is going to have. What's going to grow there? What are they going to do with it? Don't get me started. Are you overcome?"

She paused. We did not respond.

"Are they going to put the wetlands back? Are they going to put the barrier islands back? I mean, I am completely and utterly devastated."

MATT NYE, Mr. Wenner's affable partner, gave us a tour.

"The basis of the art collection is a lot of Latin American," he said, showing us the Rivera, the ZUNIGA, the TORRES-GARCIA. "And there's quite a collection of Indian statuary, and those are all 10th century."

"We were constantly adding a little here, adding a little there," Mr. Nye said while taking us downstairs. "Something new comes in and everything kind of shifts and reacts all the way up through the house. It has its little impact."

He pointed to another sculpture and mentioned the artist's name, which we didn't catch. But, he said, "MADONNA's a big collector."

When we returned from the tour, Ms. Midler was still overcome and Ms. Drexler was in the middle of a story. "Last night," Ms. Drexler was saying, "Mickey and I were woken up in the middle of the night at our hotel by a loud knocking on the door. It was two Secret Service agents who were all over the floor that day because of TONY BLAIR, who was there for U.N. meetings. The agents asked if we wanted them to bring the dogs in to search for bombs in our apartment. Mickey and I politely declined and went back to bed."

At that, everyone laughed, and we turned and walked to the door, passing the two fat Botero sculptures, who hadn't said a word.

*With Paula Schwartz*