

EYE ON O.C.



By Anne Valdespino

A HEIST IN BROAD DAYLIGHT

A RYMAN ARTS BENEFIT INCLUDED A CHANCE FOR SOMEONE TO 'STEAL' A PAINTING.

Fans of Orange County's art scene made their way to SaltFineArt at the Laguna Beach Art Center for Conspiracy to Steal Art, a peculiar little fundraiser supporting the Ryman Arts program.

Guests in casual beachwear gathered beneath a big white tent in the Art Center courtyard. Some immediately cased the joint for artwork provided by host galleries SaltFineArt, Sue Greenwood Fine Art and the George Gallery. Others seemed content to enjoy light refreshments of salad and rosé wine and wait until the live auction, where many observed, but few bid.

For an additional \$100, some of the guests took part in the event's signature caper: A drawing that used numbered handcuffs in place of raffle tickets. The winner of the drawing would get to pinch any piece of art up for auction, regardless of price or number of legitimate bidders.

The crazy scene of gallery-sanctioned theft actually had a higher purpose: supporting Ryman Arts. The intensive art program gives Southern Californian high school students the opportunity to take quality studio classes free of charge.

"High school students are oftentimes your most underserved young people," said Diane Brigham, executive director for Ryman Arts. "There are programs for little kids, but adolescents don't have the opportunity to explore their artistic talents."

Previously located in Los Angeles' Otis College of Art and Design, Ryman Arts opened a new branch at Cal State Fullerton to serve its Orange County-based students. The proceeds raised at the event will fund two additional courses at the new Fullerton location.

"I was always really interested in art, but I didn't know what to do with it," said Marisa Ortega, who has attended classes at both locations.

"I never had any direction until I started going to Ryman Arts."

- BENN HADLAND, FOR THE REGISTER



Talia Schonfeld, 9, of Las Vegas, shows the paddle her parents would use to bid on art at the Conspiracy to Steal Art fundraiser for Ryman Arts, a program that provides free instruction to high school students.

PHOTOS: DAVID BRO, FOR THE REGISTER



ABOVE: Bill Duffy of Laguna Beach raises his bid paddle to make an offer on a piece during the June 22 fundraiser at SaltFineArt at the Laguna Beach Art Center.

LEFT: Master of ceremonies Mark Thomas helps Laguna Beach artist Frankie Ortega, the event's heist winner. The drawing used numbered handcuffs in place of raffle tickets.

IN THE DETAILS

GALLERY SETTING AND EYE-POPPING PAINTINGS PROVIDE AN ARTSY FLAIR.



A detail from "Cat and Mouse," an oil on linen by Lucy Gaylord-Lindholm.



"An egg tempura on panel by Susan Jamison.



Diane Brigham, executive director of Ryman Arts, and board member Chuck Frye.



Lisa Aslanian, owner of the George Gallery in Laguna Beach, and Sandra Azera.