

What the \$%& Happened at the Corcoran?

By Rosetta DeBerardinis

Participating artists and ticket-holders to the [Corcoran](#)'s "Art Anonymous" exhibit and fund-raiser were asking that last week when the museum sent out an [e-blast canceling the fundraising gala](#). But, the questions didn't stop there; the preview for the artists and the sale were just as confusing.

Some events in the art world are more priceless than the art. And, this event had all the ingredients of an art reality show. The high-point of the evening was standing behind Martin Irvine, owner of [Irvine Contemporary](#), whose layered blonde hair swung across the collar of his black jacket as he banged on the massive black Beaux-Arts doors of the Corcoran Gallery of Art.

Priceless, I tell you! Mr. Irvine had volunteered to assist with the event but like the bewildered artists and ticket-holders but found himself locked out.

The Corcoran's [second email](#) to the artists who had donated work for its fundraiser to benefit the College of Art consisted of another apology and a second bite at spin-control. That email invited artists to attend a reception and sneak-preview two hours prior on the day of the sale from 4-5 p.m. on Saturday.

And, I was told that the spin on the other-side was that tickets had suddenly become available for purchase a few hours prior to the sale. Rumor has it that it sold 175 tickets within that time so things were back on track again.

Well, not exactly.

The ticket holders were now entitled to one free painting, instead of paying \$100 for it, in lieu of the advertised gala with food and dancing. Should they wish an additional work of art it was available for \$100 each.

Upon entering the small gallery adjacent to the school across from the Hammer auditorium one quickly realized that it would have been impossible to hold any gala in there with dancing even if the guests were intimate. The small works with a size limitation of 5" x 7" or 7" x 5" were hung in three tiers around the walls of the white- cube. Since the artists were not identified one could only speculate on its creator. Some were easier to identify than others; although I couldn't tell Tim Tates' from Michael Janis, however, I felt certain it was one of them. Many of Washington's top artists donated their work to be sold for \$100. But, they expected to attend a gala and mingle with the patrons and sip wine with each other too. Not happening!

At 5 p.m. artists were politely asked to leave the gallery in preparation for the sale an hour later and not allowed to attend the sale. Outside there was lots of speculation about what happened, but no answers offered. Attendees soon began to arrive forming a line down the marble staircase on New York Avenue and along the sidewalk. Martin Irvine rightfully was at the head of the line continuing to bang on the doors and taking breaks to dial his assistant Laura on his cell phone who was inside the gallery, hoping she would grant him entry.

"The cell phone is in her purse and the purse is not with her," he repeated several times. Local collector, Veronica Jackson, dashed up the stairs with the hope that Mr. Irvine had some answers. But,

he responded by shrugging his shoulders and citing his personal dilemma then started to dial and bang again.

The doors parted at exactly six o'clock. We all insisted that poor Mr. Irvine be the first to enter. A woman stood at the entrance with a printed list of names to avoid the chance of "walk-ins." Inside there were velvet theatre ropes along the walls.

This must be what they needed time to do. And, they had added Pellegrino to a clothed table which only had wine an hour ago. Entry was only granted to about ten people at time and they had the confused look of the day. Corcoran staff sat at a table in the center of the floor with forms and Laura stood next to it holding a cordless microphone. Runners were stationed in all four corners holding pages of red dots.

This is what happened. At the start of the exhibit there was a pedestal with a form and pencils. One was to run between the ropes as quickly as possible hastily jotting down their picks. Then you hurried to submit your picks at the table and if it was still available Laura belted out the number and a red dot landed next to it. The room soon began to fill because some people's choice were scooped-up and they had to quickly run to make another decision then run back to the table for submission. The patrons who were not accustomed to running and rushing around created a bottle-neck at the door spinning around bewildered.

All in all it was a good night. Where else could you get a piece of original art at those prices?