

# WHITNEY

Whitney Museum  
of American Art  
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# PRESS RELEASE

## 2026 WHITNEY GALA CELEBRATES ARTIST JULIE MEHRETU, BOARD CHAIR FERN KAYE TESSLER, AND FORMER DIRECTOR ADAM D. WEINBERG



Scott Rothkopf, Julie Mehretu, Fern Kaye Tessler, and Adam D. Weinberg.

Photos by Jason Lowrie & Carl Timpone/BFA.com

**New York, NY, May 20, 2026** — Last night, on Tuesday, May 19, the **Whitney Museum of American Art** hosted the **2026 Whitney Gala**, which honored acclaimed artist **Julie Mehretu**, Whitney Board Chair **Fern Kaye Tessler**, and Director Emeritus **Adam D. Weinberg**. Led by a group of dedicated Trustees and Dinner Committee, the Whitney raised **\$6.3 million** in support of the Museum’s mission of presenting groundbreaking exhibitions and award-winning education programs with some of the most innovative artists of our time. Proceeds help support all aspects of the Whitney, from esteemed exhibitions to new audience initiatives like the Museum’s Free 25 and Under, Free Friday Nights, and Free Second Sundays admissions programs. The expanded free admissions programs have transformed the Whitney’s audiences, with one in three visitors coming to the Museum for free. With major support from Mehretu, the Free 25 and Under program has welcomed a younger, more diverse audience, tripling the number of visitors ages 19-25 since its launch in December 2024.

### Whitney Gala 2026

Images can be downloaded here: [bfa.com/events/54428/share/69497d95ddb438](https://bfa.com/events/54428/share/69497d95ddb438)  
Photos by Jason Lowrie & Carl Timpone/BFA.com



**From left to right:** Stephanie March; Stacey Bendet and Jenny Mollen; Stewart Butterfield and Jen Rubio.  
Photos by Jason Lowrie & Carl Timpone/BFA.com



**From left to right:** Tabboo!; Paul Arnhold, Wes Gordon, Neil Patrick Harris, and David Burtka; Cristen and Nigel Barker.  
Photos by Jason Lowrie & Carl Timpone/BFA.com

The Whitney Gala, a celebrated cornerstone of New York's arts and philanthropy calendar, kicked off at **6:30 pm** with cocktails and mingling on the Museum's eighth floor. At **7:30 pm**, a seated dinner by **Olivier Cheng Catering and Events** took place in the Museum's ground-floor lobby with a stunning design created by **David Stark Design and Production**. The presenting sponsor of the event, **CADAR**, outfitted honorees Fern Kaye Tessler in the CADAR Water Cocktail Ring and Julie Mehretu in bracelets, earrings, and necklaces from the CADAR Foundation Collection. **LALO Tequila** and **Amante 1530** generously provided liquor for the evening's festivities.



**From left to right:** Fern Kaye Tessler, wearing CADAR Fine Jewelry; Julie Mehretu, wearing CADAR Fine Jewelry.  
Photos by Jason Lowrie & Carl Timpone/BFA.com



**Clockwise from top left:** Adam Pendleton, Julie Mehretu, and Adrienne Edwards; Lauren Santo Domingo and Derek Blasberg; Lenard Tessler, Fern Kaye Tessler, Greer Tessler, and Peter Tessler; Thelma Golden and Anne Pasternak; Beth Rudin DeWoody, Neil Bluhm, Adam D. Weinberg; Shaggy performing for guests. Photos by Jason Lowrie & Carl Timpone/BFA.com

**NOTABLE GUESTS: Whitney Gala Honorees** Julie Mehretu, Fern Kaye Tessler, and Adam D. Weinberg; **Actors** Neil Patrick Harris, Stephanie March, Jenny Mollen; **Artists** Ann Craven, Jim Casebere, Teresita Fernandez, Derek Fordjour, Lyle Ashton Harris, Megan Hilty, Rashid Johnson, Jesse Krimes, Glenn Ligon, Zoe Leonard, Holly Lowen, Grace Rosario Perkins, Trevor Paglen, Adam Pendleton, Ilana Savdie, Dana Schutz, Lorna Simpson, Tabboo!, Richard Tuttle, Anna Weyant, TJ Wilcox, Fred Wilson, Anicka Yi; **Designers and Stylists** June Ambrose, Stacey Bendet, Wes Gordon; **Media Personalities** Nigel Barker, Bob Harper, Dorothy Wang; **Make-up Artist** Bobbi Brown; **Musicians** Aaron Dessner, Jewel; **Writer** Derek Blasberg; **Museum Supporters** Judy Hart Angelo, Paul Arnhold, Jill Bikoff, Neil Bluhm, Stewart Butterfield and Jen Rubio, David Cancel, Nancy and Steve Crown, Pamella Roland DeVos, Beth

DeWoody, Kyle DeWoody, Fairfax Dorn, Marcia Dunn, Lise Evans, Katja Goldman, Bennett Goodman, Susan K. Hess, Robert Hurst and Soledad DeLeon Hurst, Gaurav Kapadia and Sonia Kapadia, Michael and Ronnie Kassan, Neal Katyal, Claudia Laviada, Cathy Ho Lee, Jonathan and Barbara Lee, Miyoung Lee, Stephanie March and Dan Benton, Rosemary and Hannah Rose McNeely, Brooke Garber Neidich, Julie and Doug Ostrover, Robert Rosenkranz, Anne-Cecilie and Rob Speyer, Laurie Tisch, Lenard Tessler, Greer Tessler and Travis Miranda, Thomas E. and Diane Tuft, Ku-Ling Yurman; **Supporters of the Arts** Sofia Cohen, Donna De Salvo, Marc Glimcher, Thelma Golden, Anne Pasternak, Antwaun Sargent; **Whitney Curators** Kim Conaty, Adrienne Edwards, Jennie Goldstein, Marcela Guerrero, Barbara Haskell, Chrissie Iles, Dan Nadel, Meg Onli, Christiane Paul; and **Alice Pratt Brown Director of the Whitney Museum** Scott Rothkopf.



**From left to right:** Amante 1530 signature cocktail; Dinner from Olivier Cheng Catering and Events; LALO Tequila. Photos by Jason Lowrie & Carl Timpone/BFA.com

Gala guests enjoyed cocktails courtesy of **LALO Tequila** and **Amante 1530**. During cocktail hour, the refreshing Amante Spritz was made with Amante 1530, prosecco, soda water, and lemon. Guests also sipped on margaritas made with LALO Tequila, blood orange, fresh lime, spice, agave, and thyme in the eighth-floor Studio Bar and in the Museum's large Richard Artschwager-designed elevator. Following the cocktail hour, guests dined on a special menu of sweet & spicy bacon with a variety of grissini, The Nines potato with caviar, and filet of beef with morel mushroom, parsnip purée, and English peas, with an assortment of bite-sized sweets for dessert. Gala Co-Chair and Board President **Anne-Cecilie Engell Speyer** welcomed guests as they sat down for dinner. During dinner, Whitney Museum Director **Scott Rothkopf** gave welcome remarks and introduced Trustees **Joanne Leonhardt Cassullo** and **Beth Rudin DeWoody** to give a tribute to honoree **Fern Kaye Tessler**. Rothkopf then paid tribute to artist and honoree **Julie Mehretu**. Guests then enjoyed a video tribute to Director Emeritus **Adam Weinberg**, thanking him for his enduring dedication to the Museum. After dinner, Engell Speyer introduced two-time **Grammy Award winner Shaggy**, who treated guests to a live performance.



**From left to right:** Anne-Cecilie Engell Speyer, Susan Hess, and Brooke Garber Neidich; Jewel; Megan Hilty, Pamela Roland, and June Ambrose. Photos by Jason Lowrie & Carl Timpone/BFA.com



**From left to right:** Laurie Tisch; Trevor Paglen and Lacey Dorn; Carl Wilson. Photos by Jason Lowrie & Carl Timpone/BFA.com



**From left to right:** Julie Mehretu; Shaggy and Fern Kaye Tessler; Adam D. Weinberg. Photos by Jason Lowrie & Carl Timpone/BFA.com

**WHEN**

Tuesday, May 19, 2026

Whitney Gala Cocktails: 6:30 pm

Whitney Gala Dinner: 7:30 pm

## **WHERE**

Whitney Museum of American Art  
99 Gansevoort Street  
New York, NY 10014

## **GALA HONOREES**

Julie Mehretu, Fern Kaye Tessler, Adam D. Weinberg

## **DINNER COMMITTEE**

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**From left to right:** Julie Mehretu, Fern Kaye Tessler, Adam D. Weinberg.  
Photos by Jason Lowrie & Carl Timpone/BFA.com

### **About the 2026 Gala Honorees**

Honoree **Julie Mehretu**, born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1970, is a world-renowned painter who lives and works in New York City. She earned a BA from Kalamazoo College, studied at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, and received an MFA with honors from Rhode Island School of Design in 1997. Her painting, drawing, and printmaking practice is celebrated for its layered, energetic compositions that examine history, movement, space, and contemporary social experience. Mehretu has received major honors including the MacArthur Foundation Award, the Berlin Prize, the U.S. Department of State Medal of Arts, and, in 2025, was named an Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters by the French Ministry of Culture. She was also included on Time's list of the 100 most influential people in 2020, designed the twentieth BMW Art Car in 2024, and created *Uprising of the Sun* for the Obama Presidential Center. Major

surveys of her work have been presented at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, High Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, Walker Art Center, Palazzo Grassi, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia. Mehretu is a member of several leading academies and serves on the board of the Whitney Museum of American Art, while also supporting global arts and civic initiatives. In 2025, she contributed to the Whitney's Free 25 and Under admission initiative, expanding access for young people to experience and engage with contemporary art.

**Fern Kaye Tessler** is a philanthropist, art collector, and Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Whitney Museum of American Art, where she has served since joining the Board in 2008. A deeply engaged leader for nearly two decades, she served as Board President from 2021 to 2025 and continues to play an active role across numerous committees and acquisition groups. Tessler has been a significant supporter of the Museum's long-term growth, including contributions to its downtown building campaign and the renovation of the Lichtenstein Studio, home of the Whitney's renowned Independent Study Program. Beyond the Whitney, she is an active civic leader involved with New York-Presbyterian Hospital, the Carl Schurz Park Conservancy, Temple Shaaray Tefila, and the Lupus Research Alliance. She previously worked in estate planning at Barry Kaye Associates until retiring in 2002.

**Adam D. Weinberg**, the cherished curator, writer, and museum leader who served as the Alice Pratt Brown Director of the Whitney Museum of American Art from 2003 to 2023, leading the institution through two decades of growth and transformation. He earned a BA from Brandeis University and an MFA from Visual Studies Workshop. Before returning to the Whitney, he held leadership and curatorial roles at the Addison Gallery of American Art, the American Center in Paris, and the Walker Art Center. Throughout his career, he curated major exhibitions featuring artists such as Edward Hopper, Isamu Noguchi, Alex Katz, Sol LeWitt, and Frank Stella, while also organizing public projects with figures including Yoko Ono and Lorna Simpson. Weinberg has served on the boards of numerous cultural institutions, including the American Academy in Rome, Storm King Art Center, and the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. He has also held advisory roles with organizations such as the Archives of American Art and Harvard Art Museums. His many honors include honorary degrees from Colby College, Hamilton College, and Pratt Institute. In 2015, he was named an Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters by the French government in recognition of his contributions to the arts.

## SPONSORS

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## PRESS CONTACT

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## ABOUT THE WHITNEY

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for ninety years. The core of the Whitney’s mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

### **Whitney Museum Land Acknowledgment**

The Whitney is located in Lenapehoking, the ancestral homeland of the Lenape. The name Manhattan comes from their word Mannahatta, meaning “island of many hills.” The Museum’s current site is close to land that was a Lenape fishing and planting site called Sapponckanikan (“tobacco field”). The Whitney acknowledges the displacement of this region’s original inhabitants and the Lenape diaspora that exists today.

As a museum of American art in a city with vital and diverse communities of Indigenous people, the Whitney recognizes the historical exclusion of Indigenous artists from its collection and program. The Museum is committed to addressing these erasures and honoring the perspectives of Indigenous artists and communities as we work for a more equitable future. To read more about the Museum’s Land Acknowledgment, [visit the Museum’s website](#).

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