



Heffernan Morgan designed the clear tent that housed the Women's Board gala.

Art Opening

To mark the debut of its modern wing, the Art Institute of Chicago hosted 26 events in 10 days, each targeting a different demographic.

CHICAGO One of the most anticipated openings in recent Chicago history—and a pretty big deal in the art world at large—the Art Institute of Chicago's new modern wing opened to the public May 16. A civic dedication drew masses to a closed-off section of Monroe Street, where the building's architect, Renzo Piano, spoke and guests got a free tour. For museum staffers and their production partners at TBA Global, managing the public opening was just one task of many surrounding the debut.

"We did about 26 events within 10 days," said Linsey Foster, the museum's director of constituent relations. Planned over 18 months, each event targeted a distinct audience. Along with teachers at the School of the Art Institute, donors, and members, "we wanted to welcome people that were new to us."

The 10-day string of events began on May 6, with a party for museum staffers in the new wing. Each employee was allowed to bring a guest, which brought the cocktail fete's head count to 1,200. "We normally don't have guests come to

our staff parties, but we sort of blew this one out," Foster said.

The staff party was followed by happenings that included a preview for the students and faculty of the museum's school on May 7, an exclusive Women's Board gala that drew nearly 1,100 guests to the museum on May 9, tours of the museum for 600 public school children on May 11, a cocktail party for local education professionals later that evening, three days' worth of free tours for members of the museum, and a private dinner for artist Cy Twombly—whose work will comprise the first exhibition in the Abbot Galleries—on May 14.

Friday, May 15, began a period that "was referred to internally as party-palooza," said Foster. A press luncheon invited editors to tour the modern wing. That evening, a private cocktail reception for 1,500 representatives of the art world—painters, dealers, museum leaders—preceded the Young Modern Ball.

Occupying the modern wing and its adjoining Regenstein galleries, the ball drew some 1,500 guests. Foster said that holding a multiple-bar-equipped, dance-music-fueled bash at a museum filled with priceless art presented some challenges. "Our main responsibility is to be the keeper of treasures that should be seen for generations to come," she said.

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A full list of vendors, plus more details and photos from the Art Institute's opening events

Along with stocking bars with only clear liquids, the museum loaded up on security as well as drop-trays and tables, since cocktails weren't allowed in the galleries. —Jenny Berg