

Artists Toast Martin Friedman's Commitment to Clean Snow

"I swear to you I would not be here tonight if it had not been for Martin and the Walker," said Chuck Close in a ceremony at Manhattan's elegant Prince George Ballroom last night. Close was one of more than 300 guests honoring curator and writer Martin Friedman for his six-decade career supporting contemporary art. The party—a four-course dinner with plenty of booze—was being thrown by the Madison Park Conservancy, of which Friedman has been a key advisor and supporter since 2004. Artists, curators, dealers and collectors flew in from around the world to join in the tribute, which raised \$1 million for Madison Park's newly established Martin Friedman Endowment Fund.



VIEW SLIDESHOW Philip Glass at the Madison Square Art benefit honoring Martin Friedman. [BFAnyc.com/Courtesy Madison Square Park Conservancy](http://BFAnyc.com/CourtesyMadisonSquareParkConservancy); Sarah Lewis, Lisa Phillips, and Adam Weinberg at the Madison Square Art benefit honoring Martin Friedman. [BFAnyc.com/Courtesy Madison Square Park Conservancy](http://BFAnyc.com/CourtesyMadisonSquareParkConservancy);

Friedman made a significant contribution to contemporary art as director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis from 1961 to 1990. That his tenure at the museum was a key factor in the boosting of major careers was obvious in the star-studded roster of guests. Besides Close, those officiating at the podium included artists Claes Oldenburg, David Hockney, Frank Stella, Christo and Ursula von Rydingsvard, as well as curators Adam Weinberg of the Whitney Museum and Richard Koshalek of the Hirshhorn, both of whom trained under Friedman. Von Rydingsvard contributed the party favor: a small hand-carved wooden mallet that was to be found alongside every napkin in the room.

On the piano, Philip Glass played his introspective *Metamorphosis No. 2* (1988), announcing beforehand that he had performed it at the Walker under Friedman's patronage. The Mexican artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer asked Friedman to come up to the podium, where he broadcast his heartbeat, recording it then adding to it the heartbeats of Friedman's wife, Mickey, Debbie Landau, president of the Conservancy, Stella, and others. Each audible pulse beat was accompanied by a pulse of light, so that by the end Lozano-Hemmer had produced a sound-and-light show, a mini version of his Madison Park installation *Pulse Park* of 2008, one of 20 critically acclaimed installations the Conservancy has sponsored since 2004. (Currently on view: Charles Long's *Pet Sounds*, another audience-activated work.)

Each of the presenters had a tale to tell about Friedman, who was repeatedly accused—with no small degree of affection—of being a "control freak" who attended to every detail of his exhibitions, from overseeing often challenging, large scale installations—such as Lynda Benglis's *Adhesive Products*, part of the 1971 Walker exhibition "Works for New Spaces"—to making sure the snow in front of the museum was regularly turned to hide unsightly dog pee. This "attention to detail and commitment to excellence," said current Walker director Olga Viso, is a legacy that reverberates at the museum; Viso still has the snow turned.

Close remembers that Friedman and the Walker made the first purchase of a work from his studio, paying \$1,300 ("\$650 per year for two years"). Koshalek deemed him a "shaman." Oldenburg described the sculpture garden he established at the Walker "a marvel." At some point years ago, Weinberg called Friedman an "old fart," to which Friedman responded, wagging his finger, "You too will become the victim of your generation!" (Attention Biennial critics!) Around 10:30, guests began filing out (one stream included John Baldessari, Oldenburg and Lawrence Weiner, hitching up his jeans), and headed down the street to an after-party.