



New York's Only Free Art School Held a Nacho-Filled Fundraiser

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Last week, the **[Bruce High Quality Foundation](http://www.thebrucehighqualityfoundation.com/)** (<http://www.thebrucehighqualityfoundation.com/>) held a benefit to fund its free **[art school](http://bhqfu.org/)** (<http://bhqfu.org/>), BHQFU. The bash was named *Not for Profit*, and it hosted a throng of New York art world denizens, both fancy and cool. Guests were treated to champagne and Belvedere vodka, alongside nachos served in a broken umbrella. Fresh layers of chips, beans, hot cheese, and sour cream were added on the spot, but the pristine hors d'oeuvre evolved into a more gestural artwork before the night was through. Think of it as action painting con queso.



More than just a benefit, this party celebrated the BHQFU's new status as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, which means donations to the organization are tax-deductible. The fundraiser took place in Brooklyn, at BHQ's studio in Sunset Park. The space was peppered with original art by the collective, including screen prints, sculptures, and impressive doughy iterations of life-size Greek statues. Artist Dev Hynes headlined as Blood Orange, playing an intimate solo show with just his keyboard and electric guitar. Hynes recently became affiliated with the school after realizing that he lived fatefully close to it. Asked if he might teach a class, Hynes said, "Yeah, but I don't know what I'd teach. It may sound weird, but I have really crippling stage fright and the idea of getting up in front of a bunch of art kids and talking is terrifying to me." Of the school itself, Hynes told me, "It's pretty amazing that they've set up this whole university, and it's real. There's real people doing really cool things there, you know? It's so positive."



The Bruce High Quality Foundation aims "to foster an alternative to everything." Created and managed entirely by an anonymous, rotating crew of Cooper Union grads, BHQ is an art collective named after deceased fictional artist Bruce High Quality (RIP). "The Bruces" create subversive and sometimes silly art that is a direct response to the self-serious pretentiousness of the art world. Right now they're in the process of recreating the Metropolitan Museum of Art's entire Greek and Roman collection in Play-Doh.





According to the artists, it's "a learning experiment, in the sense that we are trying out ways to learn from each other. We're evaluating the results as we go, and we're refining our approach. We don't expect to develop the perfect method. But we do intend to continually perfect our method." The informal university is completely free and volunteer-based. "Students are teachers are administrators are staff," as the group says, and everyone is there to learn with and from one another.



The last free art school in New York (since Cooper Union now charges **tuition** (<http://www.cooper.edu/admissions/tuition-fees>)), BHQFU started with next to nothing, and now holds nine crowded classes a semester. An ever-anonymous founding Bruce member who we can only refer to here as "The Bruces J" said of the classes, "To even call them classes doesn't really explain what is going on: They are community conversations about different aspects of art-making today. Every day of the week people are hashing out the realities of working with sculpture, painting, poetry, video, collage, comedy. We bring in some of the most established artists in the world and we bring in artists at the cusp of the paradigm. It's a level playing field for everyone to try to get a little honest about what it means to be making work today."



Looking forward, BHQFU has plans for a university gallery, which will begin running public exhibitions based off of the curriculum of the school in the new year.

BHQFU is located at 34 Avenue A in the East Village. You can learn more about its mission [here](http://bhqfu.org/about) (<http://bhqfu.org/about>), and about this semester's curriculum [here](http://bhqfu.org/classes) (<http://bhqfu.org/classes>).



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