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Paris' Most Spectacular Party Has a Heavy Texas Accent

How Houston's Society Queen Outdid Herself to Raise \$3.4 Million

BY FILIPPO TATTONI-MARCOZZI // 09.25.17

PHOTOGRAPHY FRANCOIS GOIZE





Becca Cason Thrash pulled it off once again! And this time, the powerhouse Houston patron saint — an infectiously witty, tireless, and formidable fund-raiser — managed to outdo her three previous charitable events for American and International Friends of the Louvre. For this iteration, Liaisons au Louvre IV, she added Venice and the Venetian Heritage to the mix (she sits on the board of both venerable institutions) and tacked three days onto the itinerary.

A full six days of once-in-a-lifetime galas, luncheons, dinners and private tours ensued for lucky guests from ports of call around the world, as well as Houston and Dallas.

Paris was first on the schedule, and setting the tone for the weeklong extravaganza was a welcoming cocktail party hosted by the Ritz Paris in its expansive gardens. The next day, guests were given a private tour of the Musée Picasso, led by **Olivier Picasso**, scion of the master painter. That afternoon, a terror attack on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées — 200 yards from the Petit Palais (the venue for that evening's dinner) — left one terrorist shot dead, causing mandatory evacuations of both the Petit and Grand Palais for three hours, and also shutting down streets in the area. Setup had begun earlier for the glorious seated dinner hosted by Van Cleef & Arpels. Neither the flower delivery nor catering trucks could get to the venue in time.

Cason Thrash, who was orchestrating every detail at the historic palace, quickly composed an email that was sent to all guests saying due to the record heat that day (96 degrees!), dinner would begin an hour later than scheduled, thus squashing any sense of alarm. The show, indeed, went on and the miles-long tablescapes of apricot, coral, and marigold *fleurs* and *fruits* left the 140 guests breathless as they purred up to the Beaux-Arts-style palais.

The next day, the crack of noon brought an eye-popping private tour of the newly refurbished 18th-century decorative art galleries in the Louvre, fresh from a nine-year renovation overseen by French designer Jacques Garcia, with proceeds from *Liaisons au Louvre I* and *II* going toward funding of this enormous project.

The finale in Paris was the gala, *La Grande Nuit*, at Musée du Louvre — with seated dinner, art auction, and private performance by Duran Duran in the IM Pei-designed Pyramid, and a rollicking after-party at the adjacent Café Marly. Cason Thrash brilliantly held the dinner in the cool confines of the Louvre's underground medieval moats, discovered in the mid-1980s, which reveal the ruins of a castle that existed until the early 16th century and which was torn down to make way for the Renaissance palace that is today the Louvre.

The queen of the night chatted with guests under the watchful eye of the Venus de Milo, and guests congregated in bouquets at the feet of the Winged Victory and the Great Sphinx of Tanis; Cason Thrash in vintage Dior Haute couture gown and jacket encrusted with rhinestone beading by Lesage. To prepare and design the elaborate evening, Cason Thrash and Houston's **Richard Flowers** meticulously plotted and planned months earlier in Houston, with the pair filming and photographing mock-ups of tabletops for the Parisian and Venetian on-the-ground design teams to replicate.



Liason Louvre. Petit Palais. 06/2017 © david atlan

Darling friends came from far and wide: **Tracey Amon**, in from New York, was resplendent in copper Chanel. **Gela Taylor**, wife of Duran Duran's **John Taylor**, wore Gucci. Actress and Bond girl **Olga Kurylenko** turned heads in a black-and-gold Lanvin gown. **Christopher "Kip" Forbes** (chairman of American Friends of the Louvre), was there, as were *Vogue* editor **Hamish Bowles**; D.C.-based **Kassidy Choi Smith Leigh**, sporting a stunning flower headpiece; **Jean-Luc Martinez**, president-director of Musée du Louvre; **Crystal Lourd**, in from L.A. and wearing a gown by close pal Tom Ford; **Valesca Guerreand Hermès**; artist **Marquis Retna** from L.A.; designer **Herve van der Straeten**; Van Cleef global CEO **Nicolas Bos** and North America CEO **Alain Bernard**, from London; **Marina Abramovich**; **Billy** and **Julie Macklowe**, from NYC; from San Francisco, **Alexis and Trevor Traina**; Paris Biennale CEO and mega dealer **Benjamin Steinitz**; *Esquire* editor in chief **Jay Fielding**; **Lord Harry Delmeny** of Sotheby's; and British artist **Mat Collishaw**. The fashion crowd included **Bruno Frisoni**, creative director of Roger Vivier; designer **Naeem Khan**; and the red-sole king

himself, **Christian Louboutin**, who led the Parisian fashion troops.

The Texas contingent included Forty Five Ten founder **Brian Bolke**; **Linda Ivy**, stunning in a sparkling silver sequin dress, with husband **Steve**, CEO of Heritage Auctions; **Diane Lokey Farb**; **Andrew Echols**; **Greg Fourticq Jr.**; **Ceron**; **Tami Diaz**; **Mark Sullivan**; **Angel Perez**; **Glen Gonzalez**; **Sara Dodd** and **Will Denton**; **Judith Oudt**; **Duyen and Marc Nguyen**; **Laura and Evan Greenberg**; **Phoebe Tudor**, fabulous in Marchesa; and **Jill** and **Calvin Schlenker**. Last but certainly not least, the ever-patient **John Thrash**, Cason Thrash's husband, whose behind-the-scenes ministrations certainly make such heroic charitable galas possible.

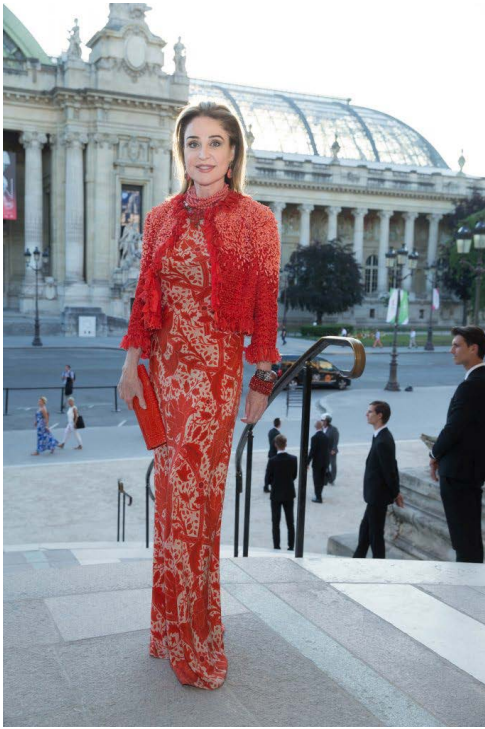
Of course, the cause for celebration was to raise money for the Musée du Louvre. With 240 guests at the Grande Nuit in Paris and 180 flying to Venice for the Masked Ball, two auctions were held — one would be far too long. Under the hammer in Paris were artworks donated by **Francesco Clemente**, **Michael Chow**, and **Anish Kapoor**, as well as exclusive invitations to the Forbes family Chateau de Balleroy and to the Fendi private suites in Rome. A lavish Brazil trip sold to **Laura and Evan Greenbreg**. **Glen Gonzalez** snagged a spectacular Mat Collishaw work, and **Jana** and **Richard Fant** purchased the Michael Chow work via phone. Also bidding by phone was **Gary Petersen**, the high bidder on the Jason Martin.

The Texans really brought it home, purchasing half of the live-auction lots! Becca Cason Thrash famously serves as auctioneer and warranted a big laugh when she quipped at a bidder, coaxing up the price of a work, “Oh, c'mon, it's only money!” Only money, indeed. When final tallies were made, a staggering \$3.4 million was raised for the Musée du Louvre coffers, resplendently earmarked for the restoration of the apartment of Anne of Austria, mother of Louis XIV, to house the Louvre's collection of Etruscan art.

Stay tuned for part *deux* of the voyage to the wild and wonderful Venetian Masked Ball, and see who bought the one-off Maserati Quattroporte Granlusso V8 at auction.















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