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Graver, David. "Marina Abramović and Thomas Heatherwick Honored at the Royal Academy America 2017 Gala," *Vogue*, September 27, 2017.

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Marina Abramović and Thomas Heatherwick Honored at the Royal Academy America 2017 Gala



"The truth is always so much more interesting than myth," actor and comedian Stephen Fry announced to black tie–adorned guests at this year's Royal Academy America gala. "You know our famous landmark in London, Tower Bridge," he continued, "it so happens that it is newer than Brooklyn Bridge." Referring to opening date rather than start of construction, this bit of information is true. But here Fry was reminding the audience of the strong bond between the U.S. and U.K.—and a mutual appreciation for powerful art and design. Royal Academy America, the U.S. office for the Royal Academy of Arts, advocates for 80 artists, designers, and architects stateside—and the gala made clear there are no boundaries for these global visionaries.

This year's celebratory dinner took place in the Frank Gehry–designed IAC building; Gehry himself being a Royal Academy admission. Everyone from art star Chuck Close and LED artist Leo Villareal to clever "consumer culture" sculptor Chloe Wise, as well as numerous gallerists and art collectors, were on hand. Attention, however, honed in on honorees Marina Abramović, Aryeh B. Bourkoff, and Thomas Heatherwick. Abramović—an iconoclast and a rare mainstream crossover artist—captivated with a simple look in the direction of guests. Heatherwick, eager to speak of the developments on his groundbreaking New York City structure *Vessel*, seemed effervescent.

Abramović, a member of the Royal Academy of Arts since 2011, will be the focus of its first-ever female retrospective in 2020. She was quick to point out that this is 258 years after the institution

was founded. “Many female artists before me have deserved to fill these magnificent rooms,” she said, “and I’m sure many will after me. But now the scent of testosterone that lingers in these hallways will be aired out and what will remain is the energy of art without gender.”

“When I first arrived in New York City,” Heatherwick explained to *Vogue*, “I could feel the confidence and energy that had driven a city to literal, physical heights.” After years of observing immobility, he’s noted that the city once again has wind in its architectural sails—from the Oculus to the MoMA Tower. “My job is to find the ultimate truth and propose what I really believe should happen,” he concluded. “And there’s this feeling inside you that it will never happen, but this is what I believe.” His open-air honeycomb creation—with 80 vistas, 154 flights, and 2,500 individual steps—is currently on the rise. Abramović has numerous projects underway. And Royal Academy America moves toward another strong year.

