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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## Peeling Back the Layers

*Capturing the Wear-and-Tear of the City on Sneakers and in Photography*

NY HEARD & SCENE

September 12, 2013, 9:06 p.m. ET

by Marshall Heyman



Joel Grey and Bernadette Peters



Steven Kasher greeting Agnes Gund

Converse unveiled its collaboration with Maison Martin Margiela with a party in SoHo on Wednesday. This was at the Swiss Institute on Wooster Street, the former home of Deitch Projects, an appropriate throwback because the installation that heralded the new sneakers was particularly arty.

The shoes themselves are typical Converse Jack Purcells and Chuck Taylor low-tops and high-tops in a handful of colors that have been dipped in white paint. The point is, as you wear them, the paint chips off and "the color starts to come through," said Geoff Cottrill, Converse's chief marketing officer.

Ultimately, Mr. Cottrill said, "each pair of sneakers will be completely unique."

Among the attendees were the actor Cuba Gooding Jr., R&B star Ne-Yo and fashion designer Chris Benz.

The party hoped to show how the shoes are made and then "the process of the reveal," Mr. Cottrill said. With the help of Confettisystem, a company that makes installations and sets out of simple materials,

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Converse built, for instance, a river of white paint and showed sneakers on the precipice of being dipped in it, then showed others in various states of wear and tear.

"It was about using art as part of the experience," said Mr. Cottrill. "It's about the way you interact with the product and the idea itself."

By sheer coincidence, over in West Chelsea at the Steven Kasher Gallery, the actor Joel Grey was unveiling a group of photographs with a similar throughline. Mr. Grey, perhaps most famous for his role as the MC in "Cabaret," has put together a series of images he is calling "The Billboard Papers."

While nursing an injury during his stint in the recent Broadway revival of "Anything Goes," Mr. Grey started photographing area billboards.

"I'd injured my foot," he said as friends and patrons of the gallery, including Bernadette Peters, Bebe Neuwirth, Agnes Gund, Disney's Thomas Schumacher, the real-estate investor William Kahane and the dermatologist Patricia Wexler milled about. "I needed something to do."

Mr. Grey, who had never really paid attention to them, grew particularly interested by the detritus on these billboards, left over from graffiti and advertisements. "What's under this one, what's under that one," he said.

Kind of like a palimpsest, we asked? "Yes, exactly. All of the layers," he said.

The actor described making and showing the work as "one of the happiest times of my life." He said he could envision photographing more of these relics that show the wear and tear of the city, much like those Converse shoes eventually will, too, but he would probably move on to another project instead, he said. "There are certainly enough billboards."



Matthew White and Thomas Schumacher