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Bash Compactor: Wu Tsang's Clan

Wu Tsang's latest project, *The Table*, at New Museum

By [Kimberly Lightbody](#)



"It's like color therapy," observed one woman. "Only the opposite."

About 10 of us were packed into a neon green elevator with fluorescent lighting,

heading up to the seventh floor of the **New Museum** where **Wu Tsang**, a young performer and filmmaker, was presenting his latest project: The Table. Four DJs were going to face each other at one table and spin music for five straight hours. A rising talent in the art world, Wu is currently in residency at the museum, showcasing different parts of his latest film, Full Body Quotation. The Table was one of his first projects as part of his new gig—and I had no idea what to expect from the elusive, experimental artist.

Even though it was at a museum, and The Table was meant to be a performance, I couldn't help feeling like I was about to enter a club. As we rose from the ground floor, the music grew louder—a throbbing techno beat that, combined with the blindingly bright walls, created a surreal effect. Anticipation filled the elevator until the doors finally opened and the music swarmed all around us.

It wasn't a club. It was an exhibition of music: a crowd of people stood inside an all-white room, facing a center table where the four DJs stood. Some listeners danced subtly by themselves, but there was no grinding, no spinning, no ass-shaking.

Hoping to find out what brought partygoers to the space, I ventured out onto the crowded balcony to smoke. A girl wearing knee-high socks and a wooden xylophone as a necklace asked to bum a cigarette. I asked her what she thought of the whole thing.

"More dancing would be nice," she said. "But I guess it's OK because people are just appreciating the music."

She introduced herself as **Rachel**. She and her friend, **Ellen**, had come to see **Kingdom**, aka **Ezra Rubin**, one of the DJs at the table.

Like the rest of the crowd, they looked like ravers who were waiting for the party to start, who wanted to dance but just weren't sure if they were supposed to.

"I wish there was more of a dance scene in New York," sighed Rachel. She was from L.A.

Back inside, I spotted Wu. I knew it was him because of his shoes, a pair of multi-colored striped booty heels that he had posted a picture of on his blog just 10 days earlier. He was wearing an orange top and black leggings and was bouncing around from the DJ table to the crowd, hugging people he recognized,

dancing by himself. When I tried to talk to him, he got distracted by one person, then another and then another.

Wu may be one of the most important young artists in New York right now, so it's no surprise that he was hard to pin down. Since 2010, his projects have been presented all over the world—from L.A. to Germany to Mexico City—and his newest film, combined with his residency at the New Museum, is likely to launch him even higher up on that art world ladder that mere mortals may never understand. He walked around the pulsating room like a perfect host, glowing in the eyes of friends, fans and total strangers.

At around 9, when the performance was scheduled to end, the room got tense. Everyone stood up or came in from the balcony and watched the DJs with intensity. Wu stood in a close embrace with a young boy, staring at the DJs as if in a trance. The music got more and more dissonant, the beat disappeared, a girl singing R&B took over, the beat came back. Finally, after 10 minutes of drawnout musical anxiety, it ended. Everyone clapped, and then it was quiet. Some tried to talk to Wu and the DJs, but they didn't seem especially talkative—they had, after all, been standing for more than five hours. Most people began heading out, pushed by the unhappy silence that follows a night of great music.

Just as the music had pursued us on the elevator ride up, the silence pursued us on the ride down.

One kid, who had been dancing by himself for the past hour or so, broke the silence.

"This is awkward," he said.