

Vladimir Restoin Roitfeld Makes a Bid for Art World Respect

By [Suzanne Weinstock](#)

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"I don't want to be known as a party host," says Vladimir Restoin Roitfeld. The son of legendary French *Vogue* editor [Carine Roitfeld](#) and Christian Restoin, who made his name launching the shirt collection Equipment in 1976, Restoin Roitfeld has been building a name in the art world over the last few years based on a combination of the notoriety of his mother, the artists he represents, the unconventional style in which he exhibits them, and, whether he likes it or not, the glitzy opening parties he throws. But he's out to prove he has real art chops -- not just an enviable Rolodex.

Restoin Roitfeld grew up surrounded by creative geniuses like photographer [Mario Testino](#), who also happens

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to be his godfather. He initially made a start in the movie business working at Paramount Pictures, and then at a talent management company, but he found Hollywood to be void of the creative atmosphere he was seeking. "I wanted to have the opportunity to be close to creativity and creative people on a daily basis," he says of forging his own career path in the art world.

Despite having no formal background in art, Restoin Roitfeld seized an opportunity to make a move into the art world. In 2008, painter and friend Marco Perego asked him to team up on an exhibit. "I was sure that I could learn how to put on a show, help with curating, bring the right people, manage the whole event, and sell some paintings," he says. "So I left L.A., moved to New York, and worked with him for six months. The whole experience was a revelation for me. I liked every single angle of putting on shows so I kept going."

Restoin Roitfeld very quickly found his personal contacts were even more powerful than he knew. He leveraged a connection at Louis Vuitton to get sponsorship for a group show in February 2009, featuring photographers David Mushegain, P.C. Valmorbida, and Salim Langatta. The show was planned with the expectation of 200 people attending, but attracted more than 1,000, including Leonardo DiCaprio, Benicio Del Toro, Claire Danes, Gisele Bundchen and Mary-Kate Olsen. It sold out in two days. His company, **Feedback Ltd.**, which includes partner Andy Valmorbida, has since put on nine more shows for its roster of three clients: street artist **RETNA**, Andy Warhol contemporary **Richard Hambleton**, and Parisian Nicolas Pol, whose show opens on May 5, and will mark their tenth exhibit.

Pol's exhibit, his third with Restoin Roitfeld, is titled *Sick Atavus of the New Blood*, and is showing in an industrial space in TriBeCa that's been temporarily transformed into a guerilla gallery. The use of pop-up galleries is one way in which Restoin Roitfeld's rise challenges the traditional art world. "I think this is the modern way of representing artists and dealing art," he says. He grew up attending gallery openings, but found the existing model elitist and boring. "It's not very interesting for an artist to be shown once a year by the same guy in one city. I wanted to find ways to best represent the work of the artist I work with, and give each of them a separate environment and a separate way to present their work."



Restoin Roitfeld has also brought fresh blood into his openings by targeting traditional collectors and museum directors, as well as bold-faced names in the fashion, film and finance worlds. The celebrities, socialites and designers who flock to his openings (and are sure to come out to support Nicolas Pol) have brought him publicity both as an art dealer and as a quasi-celebrity.

His personal draw as a party host is something Restoin Roitfeld prefers to play down. "When every gallery has an opening, there is a dinner or a party afterwards. The gallery hosts the party, and in this case I'm the owner of the gallery. I'm just celebrating the opening, and instead of 50 guys coming we have 400. Our movement is strong and there's nothing wrong with that," he insists.

Also against the grain in the art world is his lack of formal schooling in art. Restoin Roitfeld talks in general terms about contemporary art – the rise of street art, the "well-balanced colors" in Nicolas Pol's work – but he clearly cares little about formally analyzing art in terms of historical context or technique. In fact, he's not even an avid art collector, preferring to gather only work of artists he represents. He bases his judgment of art entirely on his emotional response to the work. "Good art speaks for itself," he says. "It's more of a personal talent than something that can be taught. It's all about having an eye," Restoin Roitfeld says of assessing artwork. He points to the creative upbringing as his main qualification and, so far, his sensibility has led to well-received exhibitions.

Despite hitting the ground running in the art world, Restoin Roitfeld is surprisingly humble about the need to earn respect. "When I started, I didn't have artists lining up and wanting to do shows with me," he says. "I didn't have the experience or the capacity to even do studio visits or be taken seriously." Connections have been helpful of course, which he is the first to admit. With very little track record, Restoin Roitfeld's friends have been instrumental in helping him get his foot in the door. Greek shipping heir Stavros Niarchos first connected him with Nicolas Pol after the artist's dealer shut down his gallery. "We were set up on a blind date," Restoin Roitfeld recalls. "We had a coffee together in Paris and we went to the studio and he showed me his work. It was amazing. There was a very good chemistry between us so we started working together."

Restoin Roitfeld describes Pol's style as "a lot of layers, very colorful - they can seem very violent and bloody but always with a bit of irony and humor in them." That style has remained consistent throughout the last few years, but Restoin Roitfeld says there has been progression in terms of Pol's maturity. "He's getting more comfortable with his work, more confident. His line of direction is getting stronger. He knows where he wants to go and you can see it in the paintings," he says promoting the latest exhibit.

The turnout for Pol's show is sure to be strong but, it's still early in Restoin Roitfeld's career to know if he has staying power. "You have to build trust and you have to prove yourself for people to be willing to work with you, and that's what I've been trying to manage for the past two years. It's all about perseverance. I'm serious about my work. The people that I'm close to know that I'm a guy that's good at what he does, reliable, professional, and not just the host of a party. Will I be taken seriously? Only time will tell."