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Mezcal23: Todd Mauritz's Summer Cocktail Recipe

by Noah Dillon



The Mezcal23 Cocktail. Photograph by Todd Mauritz.

Todd Mauritz, founder and director of M23 Project Space, recently hosted a cocktail party for friends, including gallery artist Daniel Herr. After badgering everyone I could think of for summer recipes, Mauritz was the only one gracious enough to oblige me, which he happily did. In between drinks and pizza, we talked about the Kennedy assassination, art, politics of the past 15 years, Mauritz's recent trip to Shelter Island, and the surprisingly temperate weather we've had in New York all summer.

M23 maintains a project space uptown, but has also held experimental offsite exhibitions in Brooklyn, Miami, London, and the Chelsea Hotel. Mauritz explained his project space in this way:

I've been doing M23 for three years. We've done a couple of really fun things, some in collaboration with other people. We did an Armory after-party at The Hole NYC in 2012, working with ArtStation. Then, the following August, Matt Maust and Sam Owens approached me to have a show at Danese. At that point I decided to make a bigger go at it.

I'd worked for a few galleries before that, and I learned a lot about the business, so it seemed like kind of a no-brainer. I was preparing to leave and had a temporary space already. I named the project M23 for a lot of reasons: my name is Mauritz, but I'm shy and don't want or like it to be about me, like "Mauritz Projects" or something. The M23 is the bus to Chelsea and I lived on 23rd Street. M23 is a guerrilla group and the things we've done have been guerrilla, insurgent-style events. It's also a motorway out of London, a male-to-female cable-connector, and a type of semi-automatic pistol. So the title came loaded with all these powerful allusions.

Daniel Herr: So why did you decide to make it a project space instead of a more traditional white-cube gallery? Or is it a kind of hybrid? How did that come about?

Mauritz: It kind of happened quickly and what I'm doing is, I think, kind of a response to the way that the market is changing so quickly. Part of it was noted in that "Saltz on the Death of the Gallery Show" essay — clients don't even need to come into the gallery anymore, but you still need a space to create your vibe. You can create your vibe online, like I do with my Twitter and Instagram posts, but you still need that space where you can show people that you're organizing and hanging beautiful shows and that people are showing up and taking you seriously. So part of my business model is to have three or four big events each year, in addition to the exhibitions. I still plan to have a regular exhibition schedule, but I think having too much can kind of burn out your base. So I aim for that *and* for maintaining mobility.



Daniel Herr, *White Nights*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 60 x 60 inches.

Photograph by Lindsay Comstock. Courtesy of the artist.

Noah Dillon: You move around a lot and do a lot of your events outside of the project space, right?

Herr: But the first one was at the Chelsea Hotel.

Mauritz: That's right; that was the first *official* M23 event. The project had been going for about a year, but I wanted to mark the gallery's initiation and have it born at the Chelsea Hotel. A photographer named Tim Nazzarro approached me for the launch of his book *No Bad Faith* (2013), which had as its subject Liza Thorn. She was Courtney Love's protégé and had been the muse for several fashion houses, including Yves Saint Laurent, and she had a band called Starred. So it felt like a good fit and the hotel jumped at the chance to sponsor the event. We had security people with black suits and earpieces, and it looked really official. And they work with Nadine Johnson PR, which was great and started a relationship with them; we're looking forward to future events with them.



Todd Mauritz's Mezcal of choice. Photograph by Todd Mauritz.

Herr: It was a really good turnout. That place was packed. I felt obliged to Instagram the pre-war-era tub overflowing with empty Heinekens.

Dillon: Yeah, I remember that. There was a video, and the space was under construction so it gave it a kind of punk rock flavor.

Mauritz: After that we had an event in London. We wanted to make it event- and artist-driven, bringing the art to where people would be interested rather than waiting for them to come to the gallery space. At the Ace Hotel we installed a permanent mural by Matt Maust, which debuted during Frieze. (It's also where I stole these tumblers we're drinking from.)

[*laughing*]

The space was small, so we limited attendance to RSVPs and we had about 30 amazing galleries, curators, and artists show up. We served duty-free Hendrick's gin and we'd produced a making-of video and projected it in the room during the reception. It was dark, everyone was ginned-up, and it felt really intimate and

sensitive. The room the piece was installed in wasn't completed, so they had us on a second floor and someone from the hotel was working with me. They gave us a key so we could take people downstairs, a few at a time, and let them into the space so they could see it in a really personal way. Coming from my previous gallery experience the whole thing felt totally surreal: I'm in London, at Frieze, people are showing up here, and we're doing something that isn't done in a normal gallery but works really well.

In Miami, the collector Craig Robins set us up with a space in the Design District, where we did a show called "Video Vaudeville." I brought a projector in my bag and showed videos in a suite there. Francis Alys let me show his 1997 video *Paradox of Praxis 1 (Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing)*, where he pushes a block of ice around Mexico City until it melts completely.

Dillon: That's a great video.

Mauritz: Yeah, I was really happy that he gave me permission, which lent it some cred. And it's so perfect for Miami.

We participated in "Pyramid Scheme," a group of shows with curators selecting curators who organized simultaneous exhibitions under one umbrella program. We did the first one in Brooklyn and are going to do another one in Los Angeles. In October I'm going back to Frieze, but I'd like to hold an M23 event in Berlin for a couple of weeks prior to that. I'm really excited by the itinerant nature of our programming. And I'm really proud of the events and we've had really great crowds. But with my social media work, with people following me on Twitter and Instagram...

Herr: You've got like 5000 followers on Twitter, and the *Times* says at least 70% of them are likely to be actual people!

I'm into the social media and web presence that you've developed. You seem really careful about curating it. Sometimes people can let it get out of hand.

Mauritz: Yeah, and with that I've found that I've got as many followers in London as I do in New York. I never got this stuff, never had a Facebook page or anything, but it's been really great in building the brand. The physical space, which I kind of stumbled into, is a beautiful old French-style apartment. It's packed with work and people can come and see the work. As cool as the event-driven nature of the project has been, I'd like to make a bigger commitment to developing the space as a locus for all this work. The artists that I work with — like Daniel, who I am such a fan of — I am really happy to have their work and have been very selective. I thought, How is he not a huge star?

Herr: Because I haven't reached my Jesus Year.

[*laughing*]

But I'm honored to be included in the space. I think the programming is really solid. It's cool the idea that you can get this group of artists together that make really different kinds of work and then grow from that, instead of getting a space and then trying to decide who to show.

Are you doing something in Miami this year?

Mauritz: I've already got my ticket, but I didn't want to say anything because I didn't want to jinx it if I didn't get in.

Dillon: Well, here's hoping. Cheers!



M23 Project Space. Photograph by Todd Mauritz.

Mezcal23 Cocktail

Ingredients:

Mezcal

Tequila

Triple Sec liqueur (Cointreau preferred)

Limes

Whole black peppercorns

Tools:

Shot glass

Cocktail shaker + strainer

Pepper mill or chef's knife to crack peppercorns

-Juice the limes and set aside

-In the cocktail shaker start with 3 parts of your favorite tequila using a shot glass to measure

-Add 2 parts Cointreau (or another triple sec) and one part fresh limejuice

-Add ice and shake for 20 seconds

-Using the strainer, pour the mix into an 8 – 12 oz glass over ice (depending on your glass you may want to use large ice cubes)

-Top the cocktail with one part Mezcal, which should be at room temperature and poured slowly so that it floats on top of the cold drink

-Add cracked black pepper to taste and garnish with a slice of lime on the glass's rim

-Most importantly, be sure to multiply the formula to accommodate all of your guests — sharing is important

Enjoy!

M23 Project Space is at 61 West 74th Street. Todd Mauritz tweets at @m23co and can be found on Instagram at mauritz228. The gallery's website is m23.co

Daniel Herr is an artist living and working in Brooklyn.

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