

# Versace Sponsoring Whitney Art's Gala

By Marc Karimzadeh

**NEW YORK** — Donatella Versace's affinity for the arts dates to when her brother Gianni collected classic and contemporary masterpieces including some works by modern artists such as Gustav Klimt, Alexander Calder and Andy Warhol.

The designer said she "inherited the bug" from him, and in another move that signals the relationship between the Italian fashion house and the arts community, Versace is sponsoring the Whitney Museum of American Art's 2008 Gala and Studio Party on Oct. 20.

"Art has always been an inspiration to me, and the Whitney is a wonderful museum, with a great program for supporting living artists," Versace said. "I thought it would be a good idea to get involved with an institution that aims to enable artists to work."

This being Versace, the sponsorship didn't just begin and end with writing a check. The designer collaborated with artists Julian Schnabel, Marc Quinn and Wangechi Mutu for the occasion and created three pieces of jewelry. They will be auctioned during the gala dinner along with drawings signed by each artist. The proceeds will benefit the museum.

The one-of-a-kind baubles coincide with the October retail launch of the new Versace Fine Jewelry collection, which is pro-

duced with Vertime, a division of the Timex Group.

Versace said she was inspired to collaborate with the three artists after featuring the work of Dutch-born artist Tim Roeloff in her fall collection.

"The experience was so inspiring and enjoyable that when I was thinking about how to mark the launch of my fine jewelry collection, I wanted to involve contemporary artists in the process to see what we might create together," she said. "I know the work of Julian, Marc and Wangechi and like it very much...I had also met the artists. Julian, for example, I know very well."

This year's Whitney gala, themed "Whitney — Past, Present and Future," will be co-chaired by Versace, Allison Kanders and Liz Swig. Artist Beth Campbell is creating a special installation for the event that is inspired by the theme. The Studio party, which traditionally follows the gala in the museum's lower gallery, will be hosted by Christina Ricci, Alexandra Richards, Amanda Hearst, Dalia Oberlander, Matthew Brannon, Martin Dawson, Barbara and Andrew Mandell, Leighton Meester and the Whitney Artists Council.

Versace said she plans to help the bidding process at the gala. "I hope the three pieces will find good homes where they will bring pleasure and excitement," she said.