

Embattled National Arts Club President Aldon James Ousted

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Aldon James became the focus of two law enforcement probes for financial mismanagement, first reported by DNAinfo. To read the article on DNAinfo.com with slideshow and comments, [click here](#).



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GRAMERCY PARK - The [National Arts Club](#) has a new president after 25 years with the eccentric [O. Aldon James](#) - who's being probed for alleged financial mismanagement - at the helm.

James, whose latest alleged misdeeds were first exposed by DNAinfo, was expected to run, but was nowhere to be found at the board meeting Thursday night.

Sources said he withdrew his name from consideration just prior to the meeting.

After the election, the club didn't waste any time scrubbing the memory of the embattled president from the venerable, 113-year-old institution at 15 Gramercy Park South - removing his portrait that hung on the wall, insiders told DNAinfo.

In James' place, the club's governors chose Dianne Bernhard, a painter and philanthropist.

Bernhard - [who had been acting president since March when James was forced to take a "well earned vacation" amid a series of controversies](#) - ran unopposed, board members said.

[James is currently being investigated by the state Attorney General's office and Manhattan District Attorney's office](#) for financial mismanagement.

He has faced scrutiny since DNAinfo first reported allegations that he was secretly using club apartments to hoard antiques, art and other junk he buys at flea markets.

Yet he still lives in the club's building where he rented apartments for himself, his twin brother and a family friend at below-market rates.

[James paid \\$1,143 a month for an apartment in the club.](#) while his brother paid \$356 a month and Steven Leitner paid \$858, according to tax filings.

"It's a good day. It's a new day," said John Morisano, a newly-elected board member who was appointed first vice-president, Bernhard's previous position.

"I'm excited for the opportunity to be part of the National Arts Club, and I mean that sincerely. The club has nothing but opportunity in front of it."

Morisano said the focus moving forward would be on fulfilling the club's mission of "educating the American public in the fine arts" for its "members, guests and public."

He declined to comment on the outgoing president, but was optimistic about Bernhard's capabilities.

"The National Arts Club made a good choice and it's fortuitous that Dianne was here when she was and was able to step forward," Morisano said. "She has a rare combination of traits. She's an artist by trade. She's run foundations. She's passionate about the arts and artists."

As soon as Bernhard - who rents an apartment in the club for \$7,600 a month - filled James' shoes in March, she rolled up her sleeves to start [cleaning out many of the rooms.](#)

She has said that the board was cooperating with investigators.