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Inside Art

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Whitney Biennial Stretches to Armory

As the countdown to the 2008 Whitney Biennial begins, details are emerging about that giant survey of American art that takes over most of the museum's Marcel Breuer building. The next one, opening on March 6, will briefly spill into another East Side landmark, the Seventh Regiment Armory at Park Avenue and 67th Street.

From March 4 through March 22, a series of performances, temporary installations and other events will be held in the cavernous drill shed and some period rooms of the armory. The nonprofit Art Production Fund is collaborating with the Whitney on these larger-scale projects.

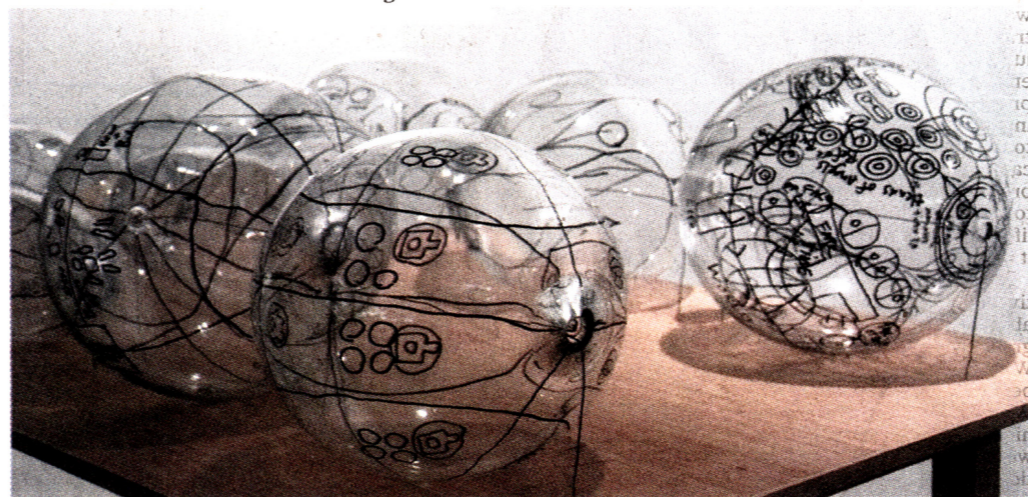
"It is a physical manifestation of the ideas that are fundamental to much of the work that will be included in this year's biennial," said Donna De Salvo, the Whitney's chief curator, who is overseeing the biennial, which runs through June 1.

The last biennial was unusual for having a theme — "Day for Night" — but for the 2008 version the curators are returning to past practice. "It's definitely a survey exhibition," said Henriette Huldish, an assistant curator at the Whitney, who is organizing the biennial with Shamim M. Momin, an associate curator and branch director of the Whitney Museum at Altria.

There are also three advisers: Thelma Golden, a former Whitney curator and now director of the Studio Museum in Harlem; Bill Horrigan, director of the media arts department at the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University; and Linda Norden, an independent curator.

Despite so many sets of eyes scrutinizing where American art stands at this moment, there will be fewer artists participating: 81 artists have been chosen, compared with 100 two years ago.

The curators say this biennial will replace the post-punk look of the last one with more installation works and more art that crosses disciplines.



A new version of Matt Mullican's "Untitled (Ellipses and Balls)" will be in the 2008 Biennial.

"Art is not reinvented every two years," Ms. Momin said, "but there are always shifts in the way art making is practiced, and we hope to reflect them."

Among those shifts is something the curators call "expanding practices," meaning that artists are working in various mediums. Rather than making paintings, sculptures or installations to be seen in galleries, for example, artists are branching out onto the stage. That's where the armory comes in — an artist who has a painting hanging on the Whitney's walls may also be performing in the drill hall.

A peek at the list of participants offers some clues about what to expect. There are established artists — including John Baldessari, Robert Bechtle, Mary Heilmann, Michael Smith, Sherrie Levine and Olivier Mosset — whom Ms. Momin described as influential with younger artists. For some, this will be their first appearance in a Whitney Biennial; others, like Mr. Baldessari and Ms. Levine, have been included before.

The list underscores the continuing phenomenon of artist collectives and collaboratives in the contemporary art landscape. One New York collaborative, Mika Tajima/New Humans, will exhibit an installation of modular architectural elements ac-

companied by a video that will change throughout the biennial.

A hypnosis performance by the conceptual artist Matt Mullican will be held at the armory, and will also be seen in video form in his installation at the Whitney. Other events will focus on the armory audience, including "Gang Gang Dance," five artists who play in a band together; the mixed-media elements of their performance may remain at the armory.

Mario Ybarra Jr., a Los Angeles artist, is planning an interactive installation that will be on view through the armory portion of the biennial. Agathe Snow, a New York performance artist and sculptor, will organize a dance marathon in the hall.

The Whitney Biennial historically uncovers new talent and new names, and among the first timers in 2008 are Rashawn Griffin, a sculptor from New York; Mika Rottenberg, an Argentine video artist who lives in New York; Amanda Ross-Ho, a Los Angeles installation artist; Adler Guerrier, a Haitian-born music-video artist and photographer from Miami; Ry Rocklen, a Los Angeles sculptor; and Mitzi Pederson, a sculptor from San Francisco.

The influence of each adviser is evident. Several of the chosen artists, including Edgar Arce-

neaux, William Cordova and Mr. Griffin, have been shown at the Studio Museum, where Ms. Golden is the director and chief curator. There is a significant documentary component, reflecting Mr. Horrigan's interests, that includes Spike Lee's "When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts," a documentary about the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Ms. Norden's hand can be seen in the presence of painters like Ms. Heilmann.