

## Leaving postmodernist and postminimalist strategies behind and breathing fresh air

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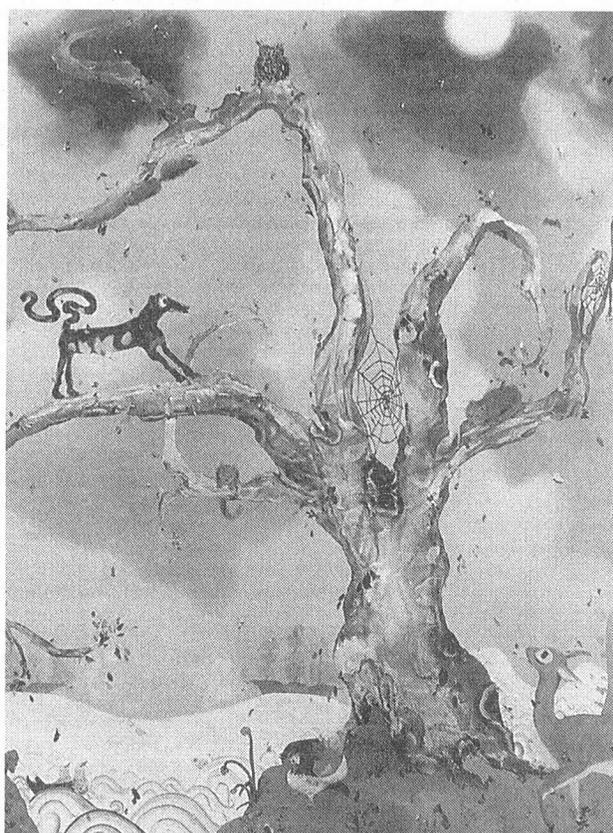
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This biennial is the most art-center-centric one in decades: A whopping 80 of its 108 participants live in New York or Los Angeles. Twenty-one artists are over 50; 64 are under 40, and 15 of those are in their twenties. So you're seeing the tip of a new generation, which is exciting. Sadly, this show is short on artists of color. As for mediums, Iles observes, "We have something like 20 painters, 23 sculptors, and 15 film and video installations." Video and sculpture are strongest, and very painterly. Photography is almost absent, and painting is weak, although Laura Owens's buoyant imaginary tree and Eliza-

## THE OK CORRAL

BY JERRY SALTZ



Photograph by Robin Holland

Laura Owens: *Untitled* (2004)

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**2004 WHITNEY BIENNIAL**  
Whitney Museum of American Art  
945 Madison Avenue  
Through May 30

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It's impossible to sum up 108 artists, but Raymond Pettibon, in his vivacious installation, includes a phrase that rings true: "The Piecemeal Kingdom." Much of the art on hand is ephemeral and looks as if it were made of parts or built step-by-step. Standouts in this piecemeal kingdom are David Altmejd, Eric Wesley, Mark Handforth, possibly Christian Holstad and Matthew Ronay, and certainly Julianne Swartz, whose stairwell installation fills the air with the sounds of "Somewhere

Over the Rainbow." In addition to a sprinkling of sculpture influenced, however indirectly, by Jessica Stockholder or Rachel Harrison, there's a lot of what I call "little art": drawings or collages or sculptural arrangements done with lots of wee bits, things, marks, or parts. Interestingly, what this work is trying to supplant may demand just this kind of littleness. Call it termite tactics.

After Owens and Peyton, the most ravishing works in this show are Yayoi Kusama's walk-in room of colored lights and Slater Bradley's video love song to the cosmos. I also really liked Dave Muller's wall, Erick Swenson's elegant deer, Harrell Fletcher's James Joyce video, Andrea Zittel's kooky study center, Emily Jacir's Palestinian project, Aida Ruilova's bombarding video snippets, the extraordinary music of Antony and the Johnsons, Eve Sussman's video Velázquez, Deborah Stratman's film in the Simparch installation, Marina Abramovic's poignant video, Jim Hodges, Spencer Finch, Yutaka Sone, Catherine Sullivan, and the best yet Central Park sculpture installations.

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## SHOW WORLD



Courtesy Elizabeth Dee Gallery

## "Coven Services" video still

## ALEX BAG

Elizabeth Dee Gallery  
545 West 20th Street  
Through March 27

She's been called "the spawn of Cindy Sherman and Buster Keaton" and has skewered aspiring art students, ambitious artists, mad housewives, daytime TV, Courtney Love, Björk, and other cultural excesses in hilariously demented previous works. Now—with Day-Glo lime walls, taped notes and photos, occult wall patterns, "corporate numerology," and mystical spells, she tackles Halliburton, Monsanto, Bechtel, Dick Cheney, Jessica Lynch, Paris Hilton, and other corporate villains and victims in "Coven Services for Consumer Mesmerism, Product Sorcery, and the Necromantic Reimagination of Consumption." But what really makes this show special is—as always—Bag's witchy videos. Projected in a faux-corporate screening room, they're haplessly wonderful homemade commercials that are far more than silly send-ups or simple one-liners. These uproarious works are also the most hard-hitting, timely, and pointed political art around. Imagine them as part of the election campaign. **KIM LEVIN**

## Making a wish list: Nagging qualms about the Biennial

## FIVE POINTS

Aside from my biennial wish that the biennial be an annual and have a 50-50 male/female ratio, I have five other list-queenly qualms about this exhibition.

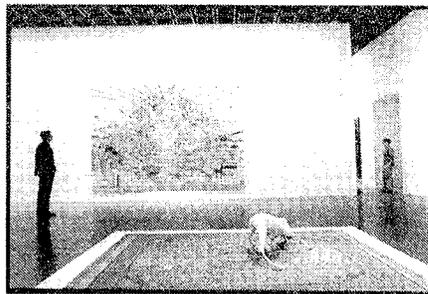
1. This biennial might have twinkled more had the curators switched a few of the big names for slightly less predictable big names: Mary Heilmann instead of Robert Mangold, Jim Nutt rather than David Hockney, William Eggleston instead of Jack Pierson, Lee Bontecou rather than Alex Hay, and R. Crumb and Cady Noland instead of Paul McCarthy and Richard Prince.

2. Nix all those middle-range artists (Craigie

Horsfield et al.) for weirder, more visionary ones like Verne Dawson, Ricci Albenda, Dana Schutz, Trisha Donnelly, Anna Gaskell, Lisa Ruyter, Robert Melee, Jon Kessler, and Paul Chan, or (even though I'm not a fan of all of them) Pierre Huyghe, Takashi Murakami, William Kentridge, Rudolf Stingel, Urs Fischer, Jim Lambie, Vanessa Beecroft, Douglas Gordon, Ugo Rondinoni, and Francis Alÿs—all of whom live part-time in the United States.

3. Why no artists from San Francisco when the place is hopping? Tokyo, Helsinki, and Bisbee, Arizona, fared better.

4. The catalog is spiffy and has good texts by the curators, Robert Smithson, Anais Nin, Tim Griffin, and the inimitable Wayne Koestenbaum ("Fag Limbo"). But the "boxed set" with bumper stickers, postcards, and "artist projects" is something



Photograph by Robin Holland

## Julie Mehretu (on the wall) and Eric Swenson (foreground) at the Whitney

you'll look at exactly once.

5. Even though he's erratic, shouldn't Jeff Koons be allowed back into one of these shows? It's been since the 1980s. Surely by now he can be forgiven for whatever he did. **J.S.**

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## The OK Corral

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**Jerry Saltz**

published: March 09, 2004

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