

After the Annuals and Biennials, the Perennials

When the Whitney Biennial ends, where does all the art go? Some of it gets sold, quietly or not so quietly, to collectors, foundations and other museums. Some pieces stay with the artists, or their dealers. But a few wind up sticking around, in the Whitney collection.

ART REVIEW

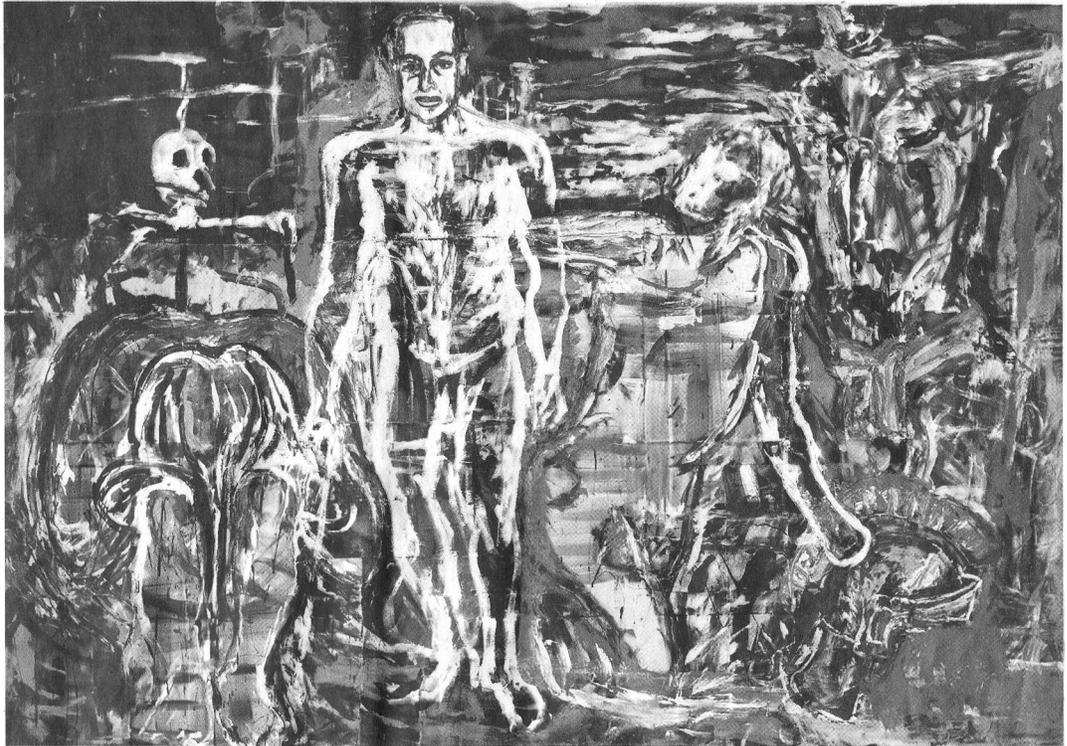
KAREN ROSENBERG

You can see many of them in "Collecting Biennials," a must-see appendage to the main event, the 2010 Whitney Biennial. Beautifully installed on the fifth floor, it caps off an extravaganza of brand-new art with a humbling and diverting mix of classics, oldies and one-hit wonders, all drawn from the Whitney's collection.

"Collecting Biennials" is just one part of an effort to historicize the Biennial on the occasion of its 75th anniversary. The 2010 catalog lists all the artists who have ever participated in an Annual or Biennial — the shows, which began in 1932, were annual until 1973 — and reprints decades of reviews from *The New York Times*. (What better way to head off criticism than by forcing critics to confront their past follies?)

In their catalog introduction the 2010 Biennial's curators, Francesco Bonami and Gary Carrion-Murayari, compare their creation to "a fence and a bridge." The new art is the fence, and the fifth floor is the bridge, "because by looking at works drawn from the collection, the viewer will understand that some of the art now revered as classic probably

A view from the bridge:
to the classics, oldies and
one-hit wonders.



Julian Schnabel's oil on velvet, "Hope," from 1982, part of the exhibition and historical survey accompanying the main show, the 2010 Whitney Biennial. PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHAD HATKA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Rosenberg, Karen. "After the Annuals and Biennials, the Perennials." *The New York Times*, February 26, 2010.

GERING & LÓPEZ GALLERY

faced some sort of resistance when it was shown in a Biennial or an Annual."

The reverse is also true. "Collecting Biennials" includes a number of works that must have looked promising in their day but now seem not particularly representative of their moment.

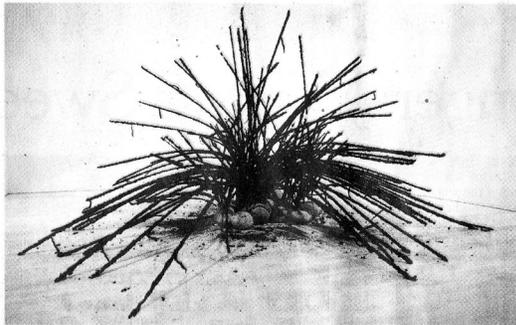
In one fascinating corner, long-forgotten magic-realist paintings by Stephen Greene and Peter Blume, from the 1950 and 1951 Annuals, face off against small abstractions of similar vintage by Jackson Pollock and Ad Reinhardt. They're mediated by the lush neo-Expressionism of an enormous Julian Schnabel oil on velvet, "Hope," from 1982.

Those early-1950s Annuals, with their since-repressed figurative painting, seem to be on the curators' minds. Also in "Collecting Biennials" are George Tooker's "Subway," from the 1950 Annual, and Jared French's "Rope," from the 1955 show — two dreamlike scenes in which the human form, meticulously rendered in egg tempera, figures prominently.

The curators unearth similar curiosities from the 1960s and '70s. Pop meets Post-Minimalism in Lynn Foulkes's painting of a rock formation on a bright pink background, from the 1969 Annual. It hangs next to a relief sculpture by the recently re-emergent Lee Bontecou and signals that Foulkes, a funky West Coast painter, may be ripe for his own late-career retrospective.

As in the Biennial downstairs, women have a strong presence. Paintings by Sylvia Plimack Mangold and Sherrie Levine infiltrate the post-Conceptual boys' club of Robert Gober, Allan McCollum and Richard Artschwager. Vija Cel-

"Collecting Biennials" continues through Nov. 28 at the Whitney Museum of American Art, (212) 570-3600; whitney.org.



Above, "Untitled," David Hammons's 1992 work of copper, wire, hair, stone, fabric and thread. Right, "Portrait of Leo Gorcery," 1969, by Lynn Foulkes.



mins's 1964 painting of a space heater accompanies an early Warhol, "S199 Television."

Mr. Carrion-Murayari and Mr. Bonami write that they "curated the collection as a Biennial and then applied this idea to the Biennial, curating it as a collection." Whatever that means, it's clear that they consider the fifth floor integral to the main show. They have even slipped in one of the works from "2010": George Condo's impudent bronze sculpture of a couple caught in flagrante delicto. (It doesn't belong to the Whitney, at least not yet.)

"Collecting Biennials" includes another current Biennial artist, Ellen Gal-

lagher, represented by her 1994 collage on canvas, "Afro Mountain." Ms. Gallagher, who hasn't been in a Biennial since 1995, is one of several artists in the show with a noticeable gap in their Whitney résumés.

This kind of scorekeeping is good fun. Each work comes with a wall label that lists all the years the artist appeared in an Annual or Biennial. The statistics are telling: who has the most shows under his belt (Edward Hopper, with 26), who had early stardom (Matthew Barney, in 1993 and 1995) or who has fallen in and out of fashion (Ms. Gallagher, Mr. Condo and the Pop object maker Alex Hay).

Some of the numbers may surprise

you. The undeniably influential David Hammons has only been in one Biennial, in 1997, although he was rumored to have participated in the 2008 Biennial under the pseudonym "Miles Davis." His untitled sculpture of spiky dreadlocks gets its own room, which is perhaps appropriate for such an aloof figure.

Most shocking of all is that Andy Warhol was in just two Annuals (1967 and 1969).

If the show has a weakness, it's the adherence to the steady diet of the early Annuals: painting and sculpture, in alternating years. Photographs are isolated on the fifth-floor mezzanine, though

Collecting Biennials

Whitney Museum of American Art

it's hard to quibble with the choices of William Anastasi, Larry Clark, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Zoe Leonard and Cindy Sherman.

And while there's plenty of video on the other floors, the fifth floor has just two: one by Mr. Barney and one by Paul Pfeiffer. (Two more, by Kenneth Anger and Raymond Pettibon, are in a store windows at 939 and 941 Madison Avenue, at 74th and 75th Streets.) This seems odd considering the prominence of the Whitney's film and video department and some of the big video success stories of recent Biennials: Mika Rotenberg and Omer Fast, to name two.

Both the Barney, his early video-performance "Drawing Restraint" from 1988, and the Pfeiffer, "Fragment of a Crucifixion (After Francis Bacon)" from 2000, remind you that some of the buzziest pieces from Biennials lose their edge over time. Now it seems perfectly normal to watch Mr. Barney make drawings while clambering up a metal plank in ice skates.

"Collecting Biennials" is a bridge, as the curators say, and a great idea. The Whitney might want to make it a permanent fixture of the Biennial program, another way for the event's curators to articulate their vision. But when it comes to picking the Biennial art that will matter years from now, organizing exhibitions — like criticism — is hit and miss. Which of the artists from the 2010 Biennial will become the next Hopper? The next Peter Blume? Or the next Warhol?