



1995 BIENNIAL EXHIBITION

SPONSOR'S STATEMENT

Gathering together the most recent achievements of current and future luminaries of American art, the Whitney Biennial is both a snapshot of our contemporary world and an exploration of the various visions it inspires. It is unsurpassed as a critique of the past, a reflection of the present, and a harbinger of things to come.

This year's Biennial will travel to Prague after its New York showing and will be one of the largest presentations of contemporary American art ever to appear in Europe. Appropriately, its visit celebrates one of the great cultural capitals of the world.

This exhibition also helps the Whitney expand its program of international dialogue, while confirming the Museum's preeminent role in the documentation of contemporary American art.

At Philip Morris, we have been active in the arts for more than thirty-five years. As our business has become increasingly global, we have widened the scope of our cultural programs to serve our communities around the world. With extensive and growing operations in Central Europe, we are especially gratified to help bring the Biennial to Prague and to inaugurate this glorious city's new museum of modern art.

Geoffrey C. Bible

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer

Philip Morris Companies Inc.

DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

The "1995 Biennial" is the sixty-eighth in a series of exhibitions that have helped define American art in the twentieth century. This exhibition, like its predecessors, is the nucleus of the Museum's commitment to the art and artists of our time, and provides all of us with a notable opportunity to critically assess the state of American art.

The desire to represent, in a democratic fashion, the vitality and importance of American art was central to the thinking behind the Museum in its early days. Between 1931 and 1948, the Whitney held firm to a policy of mounting no one-artist exhibitions. This policy reflected the early history of the institution: the forerunners of the present Museum, Whitney Studio Club and Whitney Studio Galleries, were established by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney as artists' organizations—nearly everyone involved was a working artist. As the late Henry Geldzahler noted in Avis Berman's study of the Whitney's early years, *Rebels on Eighth Street*:

From its founding, the Whitney has had a sense of responsibility and fairness to all the styles that at any moment make up the totality of contemporary art. This sense of fairness has always made the annual exhibitions of painting and sculpture at the Whitney anthologies rather than attempts to define styles and emphasize quality.... Thus the viewer was thrown into the healthful turmoil of doing what some consider the museum's job—of deciding, comparing, rejecting, and accepting until he felt, often after several visits to the same Annual, that he was able to find his own way to what constituted quality in contemporary American art.

By honoring artists in this fashion and by openly engaging the Museum's visitors in a "healthful turmoil," the Whitney established a tradition and purpose for the exhibition that persists to this day. Though the context in which the Biennial is presented has changed dramatically over the decades, and the approach to organizing the exhibition has evolved with the times, the spirit of exploration, challenge, and celebration remains in place.

The other major reason for the Annual and Biennial exhibitions was their role in building the Museum's Permanent Collection. As early as 1931, the critic Henry McBride noted in an article celebrating the Whitney's debut that the young museum had developed the habit of buying work while it was still fresh and untested by time. Though McBride, like many other critics of the time, did not quite understand the idea of the artist-centered approach to the exhibition, or of trusting artists to play such a significant role in the actual art selection process, he was enthusiastic about the Museum's acquisition philosophy: if "one were to wait until an artist becomes an acknowledged master there would be no sense in making the purchase at all—at least for a museum as this, whose business is to make reputations, not embalm them."

Over the years, the Museum has acquired many of its greatest treasures from selections made for this exhibition. The list constitutes a veritable outline of twentieth-century American art, including Edward Hopper, Georgia O'Keeffe, Stuart Davis, Gaston Lachaise, Arshile Gorky, Mark Rothko, David Smith, Jacob Lawrence, Jasper Johns, John Baldessari, Jenny Holzer, Jeff Koons, and Glenn Ligon. The Museum has recently acquired works from a number of artists who exhibited in the "1993 Biennial": Matthew Barney, Chris Burden, Peter Cain, Peter Campus, Robert Gober, Nan Goldin, Mike Kelley, Glenn Ligon, Suzanne McClelland, Pepón Osorio, Jack Pierson, Lari Pittman, Alison Saar, Cindy Sherman, Gary Simmons, Kiki Smith, and Pat Ward Williams.

In the "1995 Biennial," we continue the newly established practice of assigning primary curatorial responsibility to a single Whitney curator. This change in procedure ensures that the critical dialogue generated by the exhibition is not centered around some vague institutional identity but is seen as the logical extension of a particular curatorial response to the art of our time. Of course museums like the Whitney do have identities, and should be known by them. We are a museum dedicated to collecting, presenting, and celebrating the great accomplishments of twentieth-century American art. And our historic roots as an artist-centered institution have also ensured that the Museum remains very close to emerging artists, and stays close to them throughout their careers. I'm pleased to say that both these core attributes of the Whitney are present in this exhibition, as Klaus Kertess has done a masterly job of combining his love of the new and untested with a deep regard for well-established artists who have managed to continue to produce work of quality and daring.

I believe that this exhibition will be noted not only for the wide range of works by several generations of artists, but for its inclusion of artists new to the Museum and, in recognition of the increasingly borderless nature of American culture, its willingness to include artists from Canada and Mexico. A definition of American art need not be exclusionary, yet should be focused on a sense and sensibility of the art emanating from this place at this time. In his presentation of American art in 1995, Kertess has provided just that definition.

Once again, the Biennial will travel abroad after it closes in New York. The "1995 Biennial" will travel to the Veletržní palác in Prague, where it will become part of the inauguration of the Czech Republic's new Museum of Modern Art. We are enormously proud to be playing a small role in the resurgence of Prague within the cultural life of Europe, and are grateful to all those who have helped us bring this about.

We are fortunate to have Philip Morris Companies Inc. as the sponsor of the "1995 Biennial" and its tour to Prague. Philip Morris' long-standing support of the arts, and of the Whitney Museum in particular, was recognized in 1992 with the Whitney's first American Art Award. The company has hosted a Whitney branch museum at its corporate headquarters in Manhattan since 1983.

A major contribution for the exhibition has been received from Whitney Trustee Emily Fisher Landau, a wonderful champion of Biennials since 1989 and an important collector of contemporary art. Whitney Trustee Peter Norton reaffirmed his ongoing commitment to our exhibition program with a Biennial grant. Finally, the Museum is grateful to The Greenwall Foundation and the New York State Council on the Arts for their support of the exhibition and to Susan and Edwin Malloy for their generous gift.

David A. Ross

Alice Pratt Brown Director