

The background of the poster is a close-up photograph of a plant with a central stem of small, purple, bell-shaped flowers. The background is heavily blurred, creating a bokeh effect with soft, out-of-focus circles of light in shades of green, yellow, and pink. The text is overlaid on the upper right portion of the image.

**WHITNEY
BIENNIAL
2006**

DAY FOR NIGHT

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Altria

Bold, provocative, and unique, the Whitney Biennial is a compelling exploration of the vision and voices of contemporary artists. The diverse artists and media represented in the Biennial create a vibrant and insightful dialogue that challenges us to question our cultural and artistic values. The 2006 Biennial brings the current art scene into focus and zooms in on the restless and reflective energy of the art world today, offering an important perspective on an ever-changing world.

For the past fifty years, Altria has funded the arts with an emphasis on supporting organizations and exhibitions that take risks and push boundaries, going beyond the conventional. As a global company, we are particularly pleased that the 2006 Biennial reaches beyond the borders of the United States and includes artists from around the world. The Whitney Museum of American Art has been a valued partner of Altria since 1967, and we are proud to continue our long-established relationship with them. We applaud the vision of this year's curatorial team and offer a heartfelt thanks to Adam D. Weinberg for his leadership. We also thank the entire staff of the Whitney for their dedication and commitment as well as all of the artists represented in this powerful and dynamic Biennial.

Jennifer P. Goodale
Vice President, Contributions



Altria

FOREWORD

Adam D. Weinberg, Alice Pratt Brown Director

Today's artistic situation is highly complex, contradictory, and confusing. It is an environment few can make sense of. Despite the proliferation of large-scale, comprehensive, international exhibitions—biennials, triennials, and the like—that aspire to reveal trends and meaning, the current state of affairs seems more complicated than ever given the sheer number of working artists and the morass of seemingly conflicting styles, conceptions, and directions. Curators are often at sea as to how to approach the overwhelming task of providing a coherent overview. Frequently, they simply cherry-pick and assemble what is perceived to be the best art of the moment in the hopes that quality alone (however one may define it) will carry the day. This strategy is far more difficult than it might seem on the face of it, if for no other reason than an exhibition of works by a hundred or more artists selected with little or no structural framework will likely be seen as an inchoate mess. Other curators might select a concept or theme that seems emblematic of the moment and sort worthy art into various conceptual baskets. The danger here is a heavy-handed, overly predetermined methodology that precludes a full consideration of the art itself.

The two curators of the 2006 Whitney Biennial, Chrissie Iles and Philippe Vergne, are themselves reflections of the contradictions and heterogeneity of the art world today. Though both were born, trained, and have curated abroad, both have spent nearly a decade working at premiere American arts institutions and have been immersed in the American art community. And though deeply embedded in the particularities of the American context, they are simultaneously active participants in an increasingly fluid, global art community. Both curators have organized exhibitions in a range of media, from film and video to architecture and performance, not to mention painting and sculpture. And, perhaps most important, both have worked extensively with artists on residencies, commissions, and exhibitions as well as through teaching. Their approach to the 2006 Biennial is neither simply descriptive, representing the quality of work being produced, nor proscriptive, as determined in advance by an organizing principle. Rather, their method lies at the intersection of these two methods. Through visits with and consideration of hundreds of artists, they took their cues from the art itself. This exhibition includes not only artists they perceive to be outstanding but also artists who reveal a particular perspicacity. And through consideration of their artworks certain coherences, patterns, and relationships became evident. The curators' metaphor for the exhibition—"Day for Night"—was not premeditated but realized much later in

the process, growing out of engrossment with, and in direct response to, exemplary works and intensive discussions with the artists. In other words, the exhibition is not merely a selection of important works, but important works that reveal overwhelming evidence of certain artistic responses to a broad range of aesthetic, social, political, and cultural phenomena.

The Whitney Museum from its inception has fostered close relationships between curators and artists. Indeed, most of the early directors and curators of the Museum were artists themselves. While there are certain scholarly exhibitions that require distance from the makers, others such as the Biennial not only benefit from this involvement but necessitate (especially given the considerably condensed time period to produce the exhibition and catalogue) a direct and dialectical relationship with artists. Furthermore, given the slippage between the roles of artist and curator, as can be seen in the Biennial representation of artist collectives such as the Wrong Gallery and Reena Spaulings that organize curatorial interventions, it's an unavoidable reality.

At least a passing reference needs to be made in these introductory remarks regarding the political environment from which these artworks emerge. America today is engaged in a tragic and distressing war that has taken thousands of lives. Moreover, recent natural disasters in this country have upended the lives of many thousands. And though these events take place hundreds or even thousands of miles away, they are omnipresent through the media. However, for many Americans such events exist more as the crackle of background static than as a palpable presence, seeing that much of this country lives simultaneously in a bubble of prosperity and security. This schizophrenic situation gives rise to at least two realities that uncomfortably coexist: one of anxiety, exasperation, and despair; and another of exuberance, energy, and wishful thinking. These contradictions are poignantly and disturbingly evidenced in the Biennial itself. How could it be otherwise? Accordingly, the curators have described the museum exhibition as a model for the exploration of the zeitgeist, "where not everything is understood, but everything is questioned." Such risk taking and honest examination are what distinguish the Whitney Biennial and the artists the curators have courageously selected.

We are grateful to the Biennial's corporate sponsors for their unwavering support of the exhibition and are proud to be associated with these exemplary corporate leaders in the arts. Lead sponsor Altria Group, Inc., in particular, has been a long-standing champion of art that takes risks and pushes boundaries. The Whitney is deeply

indebted to Altria for more than forty years of collaboration, encouragement, and support. We would also like to acknowledge major funding for the exhibition from Deutsche Bank and to recognize Deutsche Bank's invaluable role in producing the Pierre Huyghe project in Central Park, in conjunction with the Public Art Fund. We give special thanks to Sotheby's for its commitment to artists by sponsoring the Artists' Opening to launch the 2006 Biennial. We are grateful to Voom and Cineric for their generous in-kind contributions, without which this exhibition would not be possible. I would also like to thank our colleagues at the Public Art Fund, especially Susan K. Freedman, president, and Tom Eccles, former director, for another successful partnership, as well as the Cultural Services of the French Embassy and *étant donnés*: The French-American Fund for Contemporary Art, a program of FACE, for their support of the project. Finally, the Museum is profoundly grateful for the generous support of Melva Bucksbaum in establishing the Bucksbaum Award, granted to a Biennial artist in recognition of artistic excellence, and for the long-standing and ardent commitment of both Emily Fisher Landau and Leonard A. Lauder in creating an endowment for the Biennial.

As exciting and honorific as it is to curate a Biennial, the attendant risks, time constraints, pressures, and stresses are more than one might imagine. I am especially thankful to Chrissie Iles, the Whitney's Anne and Joel Ehrenkranz Curator of Contemporary Art, who, having co-curated the 2004 Biennial, had full knowledge of what lay ahead and nevertheless charged forward with boundless energy, deep commitment, and great insights to take on this endeavor. Philippe Vergne, the deputy director and chief curator of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and Iles's collaborator, although a newcomer to the Biennial gauntlet, was brave enough to perform, in effect, two jobs at once. I am deeply grateful to him for having done so and for having been such a great partner. His spirit of adventurous seeing and his desire to stretch paradigms have helped us to expand our thinking about the Biennial itself. Chrissie and Philippe's acknowledgments follow, and I join them in thanking all the individuals and institutions that made this remarkable project possible. I am especially indebted to the entire Whitney staff, whose names appear on pages 392–93, for their dedication to and enthusiasm for this demanding and rewarding project.