



2014 Whitney Biennial Changes the Game with Three Curators

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by Hamptons Art Hub Staff

Art lovers familiar with the curatorial format of the Whitney Biennial are in for a bit of a surprise at the 2014 edition. For the last biennial held in the museum's current location, the Whitney is shaking things up. The 2014 edition opens on March 7 and runs through May 25.

Past Biennials—one of the country's most highly regarded surveys of the latest developments in American art—have been organized collectively by multiple curators. This year's edition places the job squarely in three sets of hands: Stuart Comer, Anthony Elms, and Michelle Grabner. Each oversees one floor of the exhibition.

Between them, the trio has selected 103 participants (whitney.org/Exhibitions/2014Biennial). The artists come from across the country with 29 living and working at least part-time in Manhattan, 10 based in Brooklyn; and one from the Bronx.

Donna De Salvo, Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Programs at the Whitney (and former Robert Lehman Curator at the Parrish Art Museum in Southampton), noted on the website:

"The 2014 Biennial brings together the findings of three curators with very distinct points of view. There is little overlap in the artists they have selected and yet there is common ground. This can be seen in their choice of artists working in interdisciplinary ways, artists working collectively, and artists from a variety of generations. Together, the 103 participants offer one of the broadest and most diverse takes on art in the United States that the Whitney has offered in many years."

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Stuart Comer.

Stuart Comer (formerly Curator: Film at Tate Modern, London, now Chief Curator of Media and Performance Art at MoMA) commented that his section of the Biennial "acknowledges the complexity of contemporary art practice by including many types of cultural producers: editorial collectives, artist-curators, activists, musicians, poets, dancers, filmmakers, painters, sculptors and photographers.

"These artists often work at the intersection of political movements and personal statements, addressing global shifts in vibrant and variable ways," he wrote.

“A keen sense of history pervades their work, even as they are involved in forging new ways to consider identity, nationality, technology, community and genre. Many of them produce artworks that deviate and morph between forms and categories—they champion an art of multiplicity and flux.”



Anthony Elms.

Anthony Elms (Associate Curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia) organized his curatorial vision as an answer to the question architect Marcel Breuer posed in his notes for the plans for the Whitney Museum on Madison Avenue: “What should a museum look like, a museum in Manhattan?”

Elms’s answer for the 2014 Biennial is that “a museum in Manhattan should be filled with a multiplicity of voices and a sense of poetry. It should exhibit works of art from all creative disciplines and challenge the relationship between the past, the present, and histories yet to be written. Ultimately, each singular artistic statement should contain a palpable sense of the plural.”



Michelle Grabner.

Michelle Grabner (Professor in the Painting and Drawing Department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, who also teaches at Yale, is an artist herself, and oversees two alternative art spaces in the Midwest) noted that her section of the 2014 Whitney Biennial “features artists who have come to the fore as figures of influence, both inside and outside the geographic and commercial centers of the art world.

“Some are independent-minded creators who feel their work is best served by maintaining a distance from these centers; some are teachers; others are ‘artist’s artists’; some challenge art institutions,” she wrote. “Many of these artists are object makers, embracing the traditional disciplines of craft, painting, and sculpture.”

One artist selected for the Biennial has connections to the East End. In 1999, Dawoud Bey made photographs while working with high school students in the Parrish Art Museum educational initiative “Dawoud Bey: The Southampton Project”. Bey worked with the students to create serial-format portraits of fellow East End high school students using a Polaroid 20-by-24 camera (one of only five in the world at that time).

Bey’s four-part 20 x 24 inch Polaroid portrait, *Anthony*, created as part of that project, is now part of the permanent collection at the Parrish. It was last on exhibit in the 2011 show, “American

Portraits: Treasures from the Parrish Art Museum". Bey was born in Queens and now lives and works in Chicago.



"Maxine Adams and Amelia Maxwell (from The Birmingham Project)" by Dawoud Bey, 2012. Archival pigment prints mounted on dibond, 40 x 64 inches. Copyright Dawoud Bey. Courtesy of the artist and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Shio Kusaka of Los Angeles also has a Hamptons connection. In June 2013, Kusaka had a two-person show with her husband, the painter Jonas Wood, at Glen Horowitz Bookseller in East Hampton. Kusaka exhibits a series of pots in the Biennial. She is recognized for her creations of elegant, minimalist forms that incorporate both fine porcelain and the unglazed technique of raku.

The 2014 Biennial is the 77th in the museum's ongoing series of Annuals and Biennials begun in 1932 by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. It will be the final one held at the Whitney's current location before they move downtown. After the move, the Metropolitan Museum of Art will present exhibitions and educational programming there for eight years, according to the Whitney.

Whitney curators Elisabeth Sussman and Jay Sanders, who were responsible for the widely praised 2012 Biennial, are serving as advisors on the 2014 Biennial.

BASIC INFO: The 2014 Whitney Biennial will be held from March 7 to May 25, 2014 at The Whitney Museum of American Art, 945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street, New York, NY. www.whitney.org.

The VIP Opening Cocktail Reception is being held on Tuesday, March 4, from 7 to 11 p.m. The Member Preview Day will be held on Wednesday, March 5, and Thursday, March 6, from noon to 6 p.m. Opening Cocktail Receptions will be held on Wednesday from 7 to 8 p.m. and from 8 to 11 p.m.

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