

F R O N T P A G E

Venice Biennale Makeover

The Aug. 12 announcement was so densely studded with “firsts”—first Spanish and first American directors of the Venice Biennale, first co-directorship and first women chosen for the post—that one could easily overlook what might be the more enduring institutional change it portended. With most of the art world away and at play, Biennale president Davide Croff announced the appointment of María de Corral and Rosa Martínez to oversee the 2005 Biennale. De Corral will present a historically shaded perspective on contemporary art in the Italian pavilion in the Giardini. At the Arsenale, which in the past has housed “Aperto,” the exhibition of younger, rowdier art, Martínez will offer a panorama of more forward-looking tendencies. Robert Storr will organize an international symposium for autumn 2005 to explore the role and future of the 110-year-old institution and then will move up to direct the 2007 edition.

The substantial credentials of the trio put the selection safely beyond petty controversy. De Corral has served as the director of visual arts for the Fundación La Caixa (1981-91) and the director of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid (1991-94), for which she organized last summer’s Julian Schnabel painting retrospective. In 1986, she curated the Spanish pavilion at the Biennale, which featured the art of Jorge Oteiza and Susana Solano. Spain’s 2003 pavilion was curated by Martínez, who brought in Santiago Sierra. Martínez was co-curator of Manifesta 1 (1996) and director of the fifth Istanbul Biennial (1997) and the third SITE Santa Fe Biennial (1999). Between 1998 and 2002, she curated special projects at the ARCO fair in Madrid. Storr, while curator of contemporary art at New York’s Museum of Modern Art (1990-2003), was responsible for important exhibitions devoted to Robert Ryman, Bruce Nauman, Gerhard Richter and others. Currently the Rosalie Solow Professor of Modern Art at New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts, he is the director of the 2004

SITE Santa Fe Biennial [on view through Jan. 9, 2005].

Most people were not aware that the essential program, if not the names of the principals, had actually been made public nearly two months earlier. In an interview published in the June 25 issue of the Italian daily

La Repubblica, Croff reported that the administrative council of the Biennale had unanimously approved a three-year plan that cast the 2005 edition as an “exhibition-debate,” and the 2007 show as the culmination of a 36-month period of reflection defined by a symposium of collec-

tors, curators, critics and historians. Croff described himself as having already met with the “most important” directors and curators, read dozens of articles on the 2003 Biennale and perceived a prevailing bewilderment, a result of the Biennale having become a gigantic

Political Art in Election Season

The months leading up to the November presidential election have seen a proliferation of political art in New York. Over 200 events were part of the first annual Imagine Festival of Arts, Issues and Ideas during the six days of festivities associated with the Republican National Convention. Organized by the nonprofit group NY, America, the festival hosted art exhibitions, film series, theater performances and conferences throughout the five boroughs. Still more political shows—often with titles punning on “Bush”—were independently arranged and on view for longer periods. As we go to press, some galleries are announcing October-November shows related to the race.

White Box in Chelsea will continue its election season programming with “Democracy Is Fun” [Oct. 14-Nov. 6], conceived by Larry Litt and Eleanor Heartney. (During the summer, the gallery held nine one-week exhibitions, collectively called “Six Feet Under: Make Nice,” a reference to former mayor Ed Koch’s exhortation to the citizens of New York to make nice to the Republican delegates.) Curated by Michele Thursz and Defne Ayas, “Democracy Is Fun” will be a small survey of socially conscious, mostly digital, art. It will also reprise some of the RNC-related exhibitions as on-line archives



Enrique Chagoya's drawing *Poor George #15 (After P.G.)*, 2004.

and with one representative work each. Among the shows to be included are “The Freedom Salon,” which was at Deitch Projects and part of the Imagine Festival; “Bush League,” which appeared at Roebling Hall; and “The Experimental Party Disinformation Center” at Luxe Gallery (also under the Imagine auspices).

The latter—a multimedia installation filled with video monitors and mural-size digital prints—was a manifestation of the U.S. Department of Art & Technology (www.usdat.us), a collaborative endeavor founded by artist Randall Packer. Taking a proactive approach to political propaganda by manipulating the manipulation, Packer began the fictive governmental department after Sept. 11, envisioning a “catalyst for political agency, where electronic art can contribute to the perpetual fight against authoritarianism.”

Among the works at Luxe was a computer intervention into live Fox News coverage of the RNC. Called the *Media Deconstruction Kit*, the piece threw the television broadcast into a state of flux. Faces of anchor-people broke down into mosaics of colored pixels, headlines wavered, and artist-made videos occasionally

overlaid the TV picture. Another work, the *Homeland Insecurity Advisory System*, turns the Bush administration’s terrorist alerts upon themselves. In response to Internet user polls, the *Insecurity Advisory System* color codes the perceived threat of government malfeasance. These and other projects are ongoing and available on the Web site. On election night in November, the department’s staff (an ever-growing list of contributors) will offer a live remix of the national returns.

In late summer, activist/videomaker Litt showed his 24-minute video *Before You Don’t Vote . . . Advice to the Angry, Apathetic and Alienated* (2003) at the Kitchen Art Gallery [Aug. 27-Sept. 3]. The tightly edited video, an incarnation of his ongoing “Blame Show,” moves swiftly between clips taken from interviews in which respondents are asked the question “Who is to blame for voter apathy?” Participants include feminist artist Judy Chicago and political activist Louise Buie, who sued the state of Florida in 2000 for racial discrimination. *Before You Don’t Vote* will appear at over 100 universities, museums and other venues before election day. Litt will also take the video on the road through swing states, displaying it from his car.

Drawings from Enrique Chagoya’s 2004 series “Poor George (after P.G.)” were shown at George Adams Gallery this summer and turned up at several of the RNC-related group shows (“The Freedom Salon,” “AmBushed” at Van Brunt Gallery). The pen-and-ink drawings are done in the style of Philip Guston’s “Poor Richard” series, but Nixon is replaced by George W. Bush as the protagonist. One work shows Dick Cheney, whose head is shaped like those of Guston’s hooded figures, looking into the open head of a Pinocchio-nosed Bush. In another piece, the two figures trade places, and Bush sticks his long nose into Cheney’s open head. George Adams Gallery will include works from Chagoya’s series in the group exhibition “Bushwhacked” [Oct. 1-Nov. 2], which also will present paintings by Robert Arneson and Andrew Lenaghan.

U.S. Department of Art & Technology’s digital project *Media Deconstruction Kit*, 2004.



Still from Larry Litt’s video *Before You Don’t Vote . . . , 2003*.

Other political exhibitions opening in October are “The Presidency” at Exit Art [Oct. 2-Nov. 21], which features 41 artists selected from an open international call, and “FACE ><OFF” at Ronald Feldman Fine Art [Oct. 23-Nov. 20], a show of young artists responding to the current climate of fear and anxiety. —Cathy Lebowitz

“container” instead of an authoritative “guide” to the new.

The prospect of co-directors, regarded by many as a way of diminishing the power of the position, had arisen even earlier, during the furor surrounding Croff’s own nomination as president and a concurrent series of administrative reforms of the Biennale [see “Front Page,” Mar. ’04, and “Artworld,” Apr. ’04]. But with the June interview, it became evident that the role of the director as a theme-setting, goal-defining auteur, which had been the privilege of mavericks and innovators from Achille Bonito Oliva to Jean Clair and Harald Szeemann (Francesco Bonami had been more of a corporate delegator in 2003), faced a different sort of threat. In Croff’s words, “First there used to be a person charged with making the show. Now, instead, first we’ll see what the Biennale should be able to do. Then we’ll see who is the person or persons who can accompany us in the project.” That “we” refers, it would seem, to the administrative council, with the president at its head.

It is not clear how de Corral and Martinez, portrayed by Croff as occupied with separate exhibitions, will collaborate on matters ranging from detailing a budget to vetting proposed satellite shows. Nor is it certain that the 2005 exhibition can rise to be more than a prelude or an interim effort, and its directors more than custodians who serve a bureaucracy bent on unveiling a new and perhaps more docile Biennale in 2007. And can an autumn symposium fully delve into what ails the Biennale while the show itself remains on view?

—Marcia E. Vetrocq

Crisis at the U.S. Pavilion

As we go to press, it seems that a stop-gap arrangement may be in the cards for the U.S. pavilion during the 2005 Venice Biennale. The Fund for U.S. Artists at International Festivals and Exhibitions, which since 1987 has overseen American participation in large and small cultural events around the world, ended its grant-making activities in August. Left in limbo is U.S. participation in next summer’s Venice show.

A public-private partnership established among the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Rockefeller Foundation, the State Department and the National Endowment for the Arts, the

Fund was undermined last year when the two philanthropic giants announced their intention to terminate support. At a meeting held in December 2003, Arts International, the independent organization that has served as the Fund’s fiscal manager, proposed a plan to identify new partners, but the State Department, eager to create a fresh system, determined that the Fund would be retired. This left the U.S. with neither a selection process—in years past, the NEA convened panels to screen curators’ proposals—nor a financial plan for the next occupant of the national pavilion.

With time running short, intense and often angry speculation has centered on the possibility that the State Department might turn to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum to organize the next U.S. Biennale presentation. On Aug. 3, the *New York Times* reported that the government had approached the Guggenheim with just that proposition. Adam

Meier, spokesman for State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, disputed the *Times*’s account, saying that the department always maintains an “ongoing conversation” with the museum, which owns the pavilion and is the source of on-site technical support through the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice. Meier added that in May, an official call for proposals from nonprofit arts-management organizations to design and manage a new selection and funding process had netted none that met the department’s criteria.

The State Department, so we are assured, is committed to mounting a show in Venice; the pavilion will not be shuttered in 2005. But a comprehensive and long-term solution is not likely to be in effect before 2007. Meanwhile, it should be borne in mind that the Fund once helped present U.S. art at some 12 biennials, from Gwangju to Dakar. While the Venice Biennale is the most glam-

orous damsel tied to the tracks, participation in the smaller, newer and more remote exhibitions may be more vulnerable in an administrative vacuum. The train is approaching.

—Marcia E. Vetrocq

Art Research: A Digital Future?

A new on-line digital art library, Artstor, finally launched this summer. The \$30-million project is funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and headed by Neil Rudenstine, former president of Harvard University. The service is available to nonprofit educational and cultural institutions in the United States. Usage fees vary according to the size and type of the subscriber institution, and range from \$600 to \$20,000 per year, after front-end fees of \$500 to \$40,000.

Four Finalists Picked for High Line

Friends of the High Line, an organization dedicated to preserving a 2-mile-long, disused elevated railway viaduct in Manhattan’s Chelsea district, recently announced that four teams are finalists to redesign the structure. Once earmarked for demolition [see “Artworld,” Oct. ’01], the High Line now looks set to be transformed into a nearly \$16-million public park, paid for primarily by state and local funding.



Digital rendering of Steven Holl’s proposal for a High Line staircase.

This group plans a series of walkways made of semitransparent concrete illuminated at night by fiber-optic material. The paths would meander through overgrown gardens and reflective pools with transparent bottoms.

Among the finalists is a team led by landscape architects Field Operations, working in collaboration with Diller, Scofidio + Renfo, Ólafur Eliasson, Piet Oudolf and Buro Happold. This group plans a series of walkways made of semitransparent concrete illuminated at night by fiber-optic material. The paths would meander through overgrown gardens and reflective pools with transparent bottoms. An alternative scheme is put forth by a team led by Zaha Hadid Architects, working with landscape architects Balmori Associates, and architects Studio MDA, LLP (Marilyn Jordan Taylor), and Skidmore, Owings and Merrill; Hadid proposes a network of platforms or stages that would make the High Line suitable for a variety of public outdoor events. Also featured would be a new education and cultural center serving in part as the primary entranceway to the High Line.

The project by Steven Holl Architects,



Illustration of Diller, Scofidio + Renfo’s walkway plan.

collaborating with the landscape firm Hargreaves Associates and technical designers HNTB, calls for sections of the High Line tracks to be converted into movable platforms that could be opened periodically, illuminating the street below. It also plans a series of grand staircases and bridges leading to water taxi stands on the river. LED displays along certain sections of the High Line would advertise Chelsea gallery exhibitions. This team has proposed the fastest schedule, allowing for five blocks of the High Line to be opened to the public within a year and a half.

Finally, TerraGRAM, a team comprising landscape architects Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, industrial designers D.I.R.T. (Julie Bargmann), and urban planners Beyer Blinder Belle (Neil Kittredge), proposes a series of flower gardens and groves of trees, with an emphasis on mustard seed and sunflower beds that could best replenish the High Line’s impoverished soil. Visitors climbing staircases from the street would enter the park amid the lush verdure. The winning proposal will be selected later this fall.

—David Ebony



Rendering of TerraGRAM’s project, showing overhanging pavilion.

In test runs, the technology has significantly reduced instructors' preparation time for gathering visual material, which often means hours of pulling slides. The richness of photographic detail has also proved beneficial for academic research. With some 300,000 images currently on-line, the collection is expected to grow to half a million by summer 2006. A large cache of material came from the University of California, San Diego, because its slides were already digitized. Artstor also features material from existing compilations of images from art-history texts and specialized collections of American and Asian art, as well as from the Museum of Modern Art's architecture and design collection. The Mellon Foundation is providing funds to photograph mural paintings and sculptures from Buddhist cave shrines in China. Artstor plans to beef up its modern and contemporary art selections once copyright issues are addressed.

While praising Artstor as a great addition to existing resources, some professionals express doubt that it will ever replace current methods, especially since slide libraries are often tailored to suit local needs and Artstor's repository is admittedly far from comprehensive. Though the fees have been called formidable by

art-slide library standards, Artstor is intended to be a campus-wide service and will not likely come from departmental budgets. And, because of copyright issues, there are restrictions. Images cannot be used for commercial purposes or included in noncommercial material that might be widely distributed. Users are typically on-line during presentations or lectures, which raises the specter of potential server or connection problems. Low-resolution images can be downloaded for use off-site (or to avoid technical glitches), but only with Artstor's proprietary viewing tool.

The venture is similar to another Web-based image service geared toward visual art. The Art Museum Image Consortium (Amico) contains 100,000 images from the collections of its member institutions. Amico will be shutting down next year; some of its material will be acquired by Artstor, which has a broader reach and deeper pockets, thanks to the Mellon. —Stephanie Cash

Richter Gift to Dresden

German artist Gerhard Richter, born in Dresden in 1932, recently gave his hometown 41

works from his private collection. Consisting mostly of major paintings dating from the early 1960s to the present, the gift is valued by experts at around \$120 million. The works have already entered the Dresden State Art Collections and are on view this fall at the Albertinum gallery. Currently based in Cologne, Richter reestablished ties with Dresden in 2002 after giving the city a work to sell in support of that year's Danube flood relief efforts. At the moment, the works are in the form of a 20-year loan while specifics are worked out for their permanent transfer.

Akron Museum Expansion on Track

Construction recently got under way for the new Akron Art Museum expansion designed by Coop Himmelb(l)au, the Austrian firm led by architects Wolf D. Prix and Helmut Swiczinsky. Set to open in late summer 2006, the 64,000-square-foot annex, connecting to the existing 1899 building, will nearly triple the museum's size. So far, \$28.5 million has been



Digital rendering of Coop Himmelb(l)au's Akron Museum expansion, 2004.

raised toward the project, which is part of a \$38-million initiative that includes a new endowment.

Coop Himmelb(l)au's design features three distinct sections: a dramatic glass and steel "crystal lobby," a flexible exhibition space called "the gallery box," and the "roof cloud," a sweeping cantilevered structure, which will extend over the old museum building and above part of the adjacent street. Along with 20,000 square feet of exhibition space for temporary shows and selections from the museum's permanent collection of over 3,000 objects, the new structure includes an auditorium, classrooms, a children's gallery, a bookstore and gift shop, and a café.