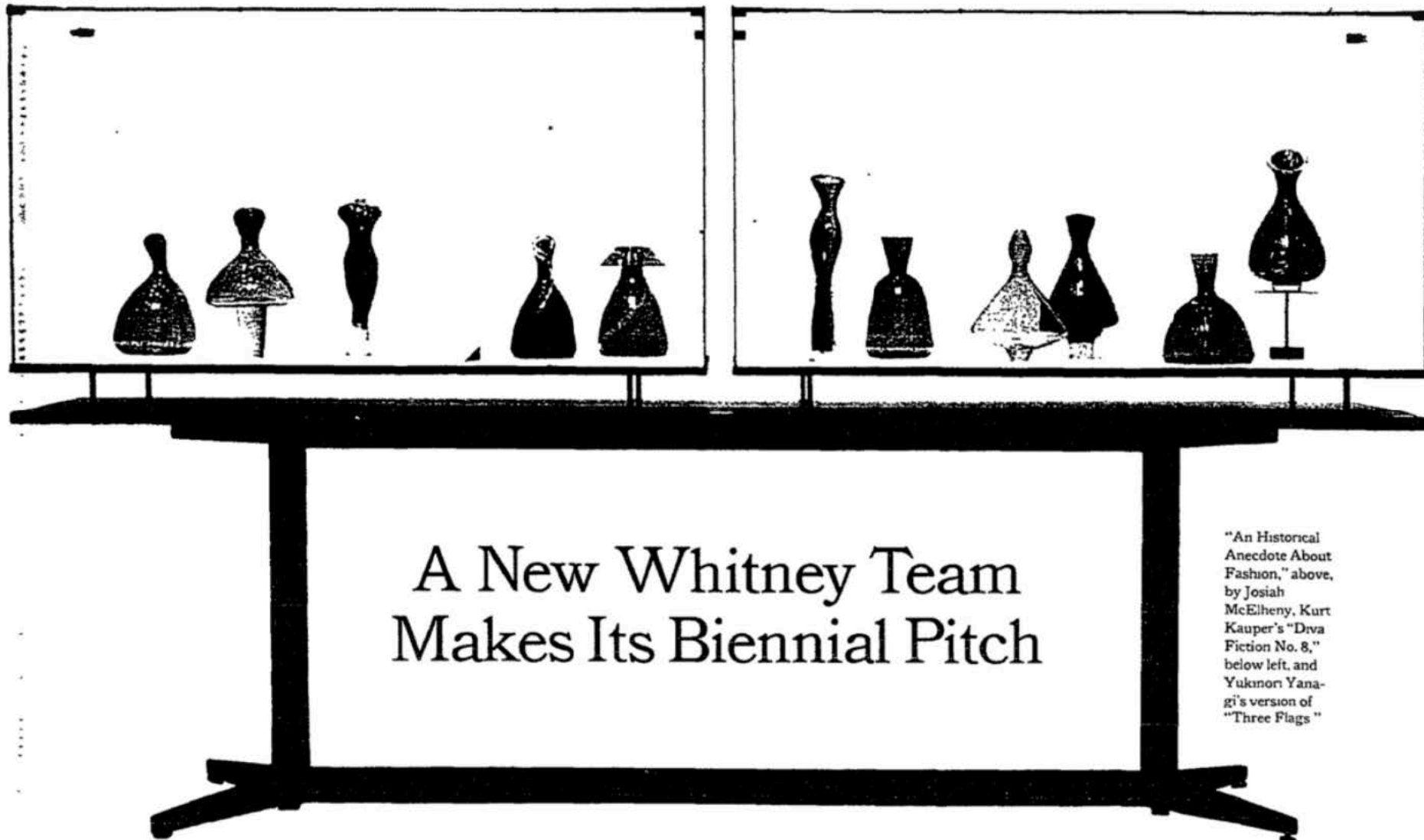


The New York Times

**ART REVIEW**


## A New Whitney Team Makes Its Biennial Pitch

"An Historical Anecdote About Fashion," above, by Josiah McElheny. Kurt Kauper's "Diva Fiction No. 8," below left, and Yukunori Yanagi's version of "Three Flags."

By MICHAEL KIMMELMAN

**Taking chances with emerging film and video artists, Page 33.**

**T**HE 2000 Biennial at the Whitney is not, as you may have been led to believe, another "Sensation." Relieved? Disappointed? The little pre-game flap over Hans Haacke's "Sanitation" may have created an impression that this Biennial would be akin to that Brooklyn exhibition or maybe to the Biennial in 1993, which was heavy on heavy-handed politics. But Mr. Haacke, it turns out is the only artist among nearly 100 in the show whose work fits that bill. It is the most uncontroversial Biennial in years.

This is not good.

It is the expedient outcome of an administrative change that partly explains its neutral character. When Maxwell L. Anderson arrived as the Whitney director in July of 1998, much of the museum's staff left or was pushed out, so he had to cook up a way to put together a biennial quickly. The solution was a team of outside curators, spread across the country, with different perspectives.

They met and compromised, and this is the result: a show without a theme, no strong point of view, not much sex, no dead pigs, no fecal matter or rotting eggs or mannequins with a penis for a nose.

Sounds boring, no?

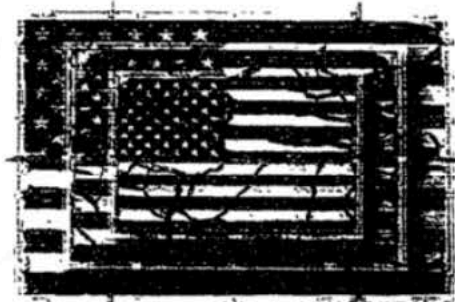
Well, it is. The show goes out of its way to be ecumenical, independent, geographically diverse, representative of all media, including the Internet, and differ-

ent from what the New York power brokers would do. All this is admirable. A few artists du jour, like Vanessa Beecroft and John Currin, make the cut, but very few. We get a group from Texas instead. Another from California. Lots of fresh names. Honorable veterans like Luis Camnitzer and lesser-knowns, like Rina Banerjee, who have shown at places like the Bronx Museum of the Arts or the Queens Museum of Art.

It's truer than previous biennials to what goes on across the country, truer to the character of the American scene, where artists come from other countries, more respectful of different generations and multiple strategies.

And flat, which may partly be chalked up to the quality of art at this moment. Like life, art has its lulls. The first three-quarters of the 20th century may have led people to believe that a Picasso or a Matisse or a de Kooning would always be around but let's face it, the party has been winding down since the early 80's and what's left are a few stalwarts, stragglers and latecomers doing the best they can. We all want to fall in love. But these days you've often got to squint to find someone you'd want to take home.

So be it. Resist the temptation simply to leave. Keep an open mind. Check out paintings, for example. The Biennial has plenty, some inexplicable, like Vernon Fish-



Photographs from the Whitney Museum of American Art

er's scumbled abstractions and Katherine Sherwood's works, which look like poor imitations of Terry Winters's early pictures. Lisa Yuskavage's bimbos don't do it for me, either. But John Currin's do, and so, mildly, do Kurt Kauper's fictive divas, proudly outlandish in their ridiculous outfits, and also Linda Besemer's hard-edge abstractions, which are multicolored stripes on plastic panels draped like towels over aluminum rods.

Salomon Fuerta's deadpan heads and houses, pastel colored and sleek, carry the flag for what seems like a

Continued on Page 33



