

Whitney Biennial provokes discourse

By BLAIR FOWLKES

An indeterminable number of old, sagging, folded mattresses with garish printed patterns hang in a tangled amorphous lump suspended from the ceiling. Chunks of cake and frosting fill the cracks between the mattresses and threaten to tumble from their precarious perch to the floor of the Whitney exhibition room many feet below.

A forbidding hearse, severed in half to expose part of the red plush carrying cavity, rests on a huge heap of rusty mufflers, bits of plastic, charred wood and other debris. Iron interior bars encircle the vehicle, slathered by inches of sticky black grease. More automobile parts swarm in a cloud above.

Seventy-eight Cibachrome photographs of violently graphic and sexually explicit scenes from Japanese streets and brothels cover a large wall. Each one in turn leaps out at the viewer and tries to dominate the overall collection. Nudity, homosexuality and bizarre eroticism combine with trash objects and lights, vying for the viewer's attention and aggressively attacking conventional boundaries.

These descriptions refer to three of the most prominent, outrageous and controversial works featured in the Whitney Museum of American Art's 1995 Biennial exhibition. The pieces are Nancy Rubins' *Mattresses and Cakes*, Nari Ward's *Peace Keeper* and Nan Goldin's *Tokyo Love*.

The exhibition gathers together works produced within the last two years by eighty-eight American artists and filmmakers. It crosses state and even national borders, including a few works by Mexican and Canadian artists. The exhibition does not hesitate to de-emphasize or even blatantly ignore more established artists in favor of obscure and virtually unknown members of the younger generation.

In his article for *Vogue* magazine's March '95 issue, the Biennial's curator, Klaus Kertess, describes the museum's "signature annual, and now biennial exhibition . . . as a recurrent and massive catharsis designed to relieve all and sundry on the art scene of their pent-up jealousies and frustrations. Charged with the inexact task of surveying the most vital art created in the preceding two years, the Biennial is always as eagerly despised as it is anticipated. Almost everyone reviles it, and almost every artist wants to be included in it."

Kertess states that "To be the sole curator of this exhibition, which until '93 was organized by committee, is alternately exhilarating, exasperating and outrageous."

Although many have criticized the Whitney for giving a sole curator so much liberty, art critic Hilton Kramer believes that Kertess's impact on the show is marginal, and that it is simply a matter of typical Whitney style. In *The New York Observer* he writes: "it's the Whitney doing its usual thing — searching out the perverse, the obscene and the political at the expense of artistic quality. It hardly matters that the curator this year is Klaus Kertess and not some other Whitney

favorite. The basic Whitney agenda was firmly in place before the curator of this year's Biennial was appointed. Mr. Kertess may have given this year's show a more emphatically gay accent than would have been the case with another curator, but otherwise it is unlikely that the Biennial would have been significantly different if the Whitney brass had appointed someone else. The Whitney would still be the Whitney."

Kertess explains that he "used metaphor as a life vest and made it the loose subtext of the show," and "wished to emphasize the rich ambiguity of the grammar and syntax of visual space, which are so different from that of written language."

He describes *Mattresses and Cakes* as "fantastical clouds of baroque meringue" — hardly the description of a typical viewer struggling to figure out the relationship between the two media. The artist herself, Nancy Rubins, explains that she used cake because "it's what we dream food should be."

Kertess calls Ward's project an attempt at "gathering the rubble of Harlem's streets into deeply beautiful accumulations of hope and humor fighting with despair." But *Peace Keeper* is more likely to horrify the viewer than to reveal such elaborate explanations for the impetus behind Ward's work.

John O'Reilly's Polaroid collages *Of Benjamin Britten*, another eyebrow-raising series of photographs, portrays a naked young man performing fellatio on an image of the crucified Christ. It is as daring in subject matter and as innovative in technique as *Tokyo Love* — but both rely tremendously on shock effect, rather than true talent, to make an impression on the viewer.

However, despite personal opinion, the variety and scope of the pieces displayed demand admiration. The fourth floor is a sea of color, full of abstract paintings created from different media, including oil on linen and oil and wax on paper.

Los Angeles-based Toba Khedoori's *Untitled 1993* depicts a meticulously-painted red train dwarfed by an enormous white background; *Untitled 1994* portrays the facade of a huge apartment building with different window arrangements. Both present interesting views of realism amidst the wholly abstract works.

Jason Rhoades' *My Brother/Brancusi* fills an entire room with a tangle of diverse objects, including doughnut makers, doughnuts, bagels, cheese, lawnmower parts, spackled foam rubber, Lego pieces, bean bags, small gasoline engines and wooden crates. On the surrounding walls, photocollages of the artist's work superimposed on photographs of Brancusi's sculpture attempt to link Rhoades's own works with those of the famous early modern sculptor. Regardless of how well the motif ultimately succeeds, it definitely requires careful observation and consideration — especially since it invites comparison to Brancusi's work.

One medium-sized room provides some relief for those visitors who can only handle a limited

Shore rattles on about shearing, MTV, 'Jury Duty'

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co-starring Tia Carrere, who thinks shouting really loud (like she did on that stage in *Wayne's World*) makes her character more believable. But nothing makes this poor film about Tommy's (Shore) escape from his parents' trailer home to serve as a juror in a murder trial believable. Not many cities provide their jurors with luxury accommodations, which become Tommy's main incentive to postpone reaching an actual verdict for as long as he can.

The plot is predictable, calling to mind Henry Fonda's own attempt to prolong "reasonable doubt" back in *Twelve Angry Men*, a clip of which is briefly shown and acknowledged as an influence in *Jury Duty*. What gives the movie its brief glimmers of humor (apart from the Cuban immigrant juror's interjections) are Pauly Shore's characteristic antics: he flings wet toilet paper onto the ceiling of his hotel bathroom, frolics in a strip scene wearing only a thong bikini and spews one-liners like "Every day isn't a holiday — every day's an orgasm."

After the screening, Shore showed up in a tight pink turtleneck, jeans and Adidas, with big gaudy rings decorating his fluttering fingers. Fidgeting, swinging back and forth in his chair, evidently preoccupied about his appearance on Letterman that afternoon, he answered questions in a careless and offhand — but always amusing — way.

In response to a question concerning the way he's been pigeonholed as a dorky loser type in most of his movie roles, Shore responded, "Exactly! Yeah. But there's nothing wrong with that. I mean, I'm fortunate enough that they're writing movies for me — how cool is that? That's so flattering, that there's people actually out there going, 'F---, this would be perfect for Pauly.' That's cool, man. I mean, they did that for Eddie Murphy, and Richard Pryor and now Adam Sandler. Why would I wanna do something different? [It's] the funny side of me, and

that's what they're exploiting right now.

"Michael Douglas, he's always playing that same guy . . . Clint Eastwood plays Clint Eastwood. I play me. When people start mimicking you, that's when you know you've made it. People started mimicking me, and it's flattering."

Asked for his take on all the "stupid movies" out there right now (of the *Dumb And Dumber* variety), Shore was quick to answer, "Well, obviously, I'm pretty happy with them, because I'm one of the people that are in one of the stupid movies. I just think that there's so much negativity in the world, and everyone's a victim, and everyone is so angry. You know . . . with the kids — with the guns — and the rapes. The movies that me and Adam Sandler and Chris Farley are making are movies that get you away from that.

"I'm like a cartoon — my stuff isn't that real. I think there's a genius quality to that. I don't think I'm a genius, but I think that there's a smart quality to be able to play a dumb guy and make people lose their reality in their crappy lives."

I was losing my own reality as the conference progressed, watching Pauly toss a plastic bottle cap in and out of his mouth. The sucking noise he made with his fingers was also fascinating. And there came the inevitable



Courtesy of TriStar Pictures

number of visual challenges. Catherine Murphy's *Bathroom Sink* is a creative presentation of a mundane object. Jane Freilicher's *A Glade*, a modern landscape, is a refreshing change of pace from abstraction.

The video and film components are unusual and add a distinctly innovative dimension to the overall impact of the Biennial — à la Whitney, of course. Small dark rooms house elaborate equipment that continuously broadcasts an infinite repertoire of pieces. There are special rooms for periodic showings of longer films.

Overall, for those who are eager to challenge their own standards of art and who do not mind experiencing a degree of visual overload, the Whitney Biennial provides the ideal opportunity. Anyone who yearns for a relaxing, yet stimulating, stroll through galleries of unquestionably fine art would not enjoy the Biennial. Nonetheless, the exhibition remains an interesting challenge to convention and a controversial portrayal of contemporary American art and the direction in which it is heading.

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hair question: "I got it shaved in the army movie (*In the Army Now*), and I kinda kept it short, because I had long hair for so long on MTV and it was such a big deal — I don't know why. But people seemed to, like, think it was, like, (gasp) 'Oh my God! What happened to his hair?' (deeper gasp) He's not the Weasel! Jesus, what's gonna happen to him? What happened to our guy?" You know, they freaked out. But it's just hair, I've still got what's in here (pointing to his head), you know what I mean? You gotta have it in here . . . It's not about having long hair. I can still be an idiot."

Hard to believe from a man whose philosophy on life includes statements like "As humans, we're like a pizza. We all have different slices." The twenty-seven-year-old Shore, who restlessly bit his fingernails and pulled his baseball cap on and off several times during the conference, admitted, "Obviously, I want a kid," and confessed that his last four relationships have been disastrous. Pauly Shore yearns for a "monogamous" commitment. That may be a long time coming. Maybe as long as it's taken for Shore to shed the MTV image: "Every movie that I've done, from *Encino Man* to this movie, the scripts were always awful. But when you have your own style of comedy, like I came up with my own thing on MTV as far as developing a rhythm with how I talk — *alk* and do my whole little thing, right? MTV, you know, I had a voice. But there's a sick quality about me: I'm not always the funny guy. MTV made me so big — I had no idea that it was such a big thing.

"I'm starting to read for smaller roles in bigger movies right now. I read for Francis Ford Coppola recently, and Brian de Palma . . . where I'm not playing Pauly, where I'm playing a character. I think it'll take time, it won't happen overnight and I don't want it to happen overnight. I have it in me, I just haven't had the opportunity. I get offered these big comedies and they offer me a lot of money they dish in my face and I'm like, 'Oh, wow!' you know what I mean? I'll make the best of it that I could. *Jury Duty* to me is the best I could do with what we had. I'm not free, you know what I mean? I'm not free to go crazy so much."

The other reporters were going crazy, though. One overzealous kid from NYU kept asking about Pauly's involvement with scripts and production, another from Marymount wanted to know what it was like to work with Tia Carrere, and a group of girls sitting in the back row laughed hysterically at every answer he gave — even if it was just a succinct "Yo." Someone actually asked Pauly if he had a purple couch in his new house in Malibu. But I walked back out into the sunshine satisfied with Pauly's simplest words of wisdom: "I try to keep going, with my laughs and . . . free spirit about always looking on the bright side of things . . . Like the sunny side of Generation X and stuff like that." On my way back, I took the sunny side of Madison.



Courtesy of Vogue

SHADOWBOX

Charlotte relishes spring sun, crocuses, youth en route to Battlefield monument

By LACY CRAWFORD

Author's Note: *This serial is a work of fiction. Charlotte is an imaginary character, and while those who know her well may see certain resemblances between the author and Charlotte, she is not real. Nor is she meant to portray any other Princeton student who happens to be named Charlotte. For the most part, fiction is tempered with bits of truth to lend authenticity of feeling, and nothing more.* Then again, if you think you recognize yourself, you just may be right.

On Sunday morning Charlotte woke up more hung over than she'd been since freshman fall. "I'm too old for this shit" she told her roommate, who didn't laugh because it was true. The night before had been uneventful. From the few memories in her head, Charlotte could piece together a vague sketch of her actions. Nothing particularly embarrassing — she was safe from ghosts of the drunken dervish she'd been.

Outside Spring was trying again. The magnolias were browner than they had been in November, but the daffodils hadn't been burned by the late frost and the grass was suddenly green. In shady corners the first insects grouped around each other in a light hum.

Charlotte knew she needed to be outside, but she could only give herself free time if she were doing one of two things: work or exercise. A run was clearly out of the question; there was nowhere near enough water left in her body to sustain a jog. The sun on the pages of her Medieval Studies book was far too bright, and the words swarmed in front of her eyes like ants. The compromise came in the form of a walk with her friend Susan, who is an adult living in the

Princeton area. Susan has just had a baby and loves to walk him outside, along with two huge Dalmatians that can be distinguished from each other only by the color of their collars. Charlotte called Susan to go out walking, to be outside and to catch up.

Charlotte pushed the baby's stroller as they wandered through the Institute Woods, out to the Battlefields and the Mercer Oak. They parked the baby in a square of shade beneath the Battlefield monument while they read the inscriptions on the plaques there. An elderly man approached them in a coat and tie. His age forced him to walk slowly but he carried his body with quiet dignity. Charlotte smiled at him but quickly felt condescending; he smiled back.

"Good afternoon, ladies," he said. They nodded at him. "I love it back here," he continued. "I just saw the movie *I.Q.* Did you see it? This field is in it. The last scene." Susan and Charlotte looked at each other and shook their heads. "Really?" Charlotte asked. "No, I haven't seen it yet." "Oh, it's no good, really, it was silly. I mean, this is a world-class genius they're talking about here, and it's just silly. But go — I mean, it's cute — because this field is in it. And that tree." "The Mercer Oak?" Charlotte pointed to the huge tree across the road and just down the slope of the field. "Is that the one? It's got a name?" "Yes. Washington's army camped out under it the night before the Battle of Princeton." "Well," the man said, putting his hands on his hips, "I'll be damned if I didn't learn a thing or two about this place today." Charlotte smiled. Susan was rocking the baby, who was upset that he was no longer being pushed. "We've got to keep moving," Charlotte said, sensing Susan's fear

that the baby would grow more restless. "He was sleeping," She pointed to the stroller. "Well, wake him up then. No one should miss this." He said this gently, but with an edge. The Mercer, you said?" "Yeah." "Better than a mall!" And the man tipped his head at them, as if he were wearing a hat, and walked back out towards the road. As Charlotte and Susan walked back towards campus, they had a lively conversation on topics from feminist theory to the best age to buy a dog. Charlotte's headache was flagging, but she was conscious of the faint scent of alcohol which could only have been emanating from her. She hoped Susan couldn't tell. Charlotte found herself explaining to Susan just every worry she had in her mind. For a moment, Susan was the mother Charlotte would have liked to have to fix everything for her. She talked about her J.P., and applying for her senior thesis. She mentioned her friends who had all found summer jobs with law firms and investment banking groups. She brought up graduate school, and her fear of being able to pay for it. Oh, and her fear of getting accepted in the first place. And her exams and this play and her future and will she ever get married and could she ever imagine having children and why the hell was she thinking about these things all of the sudden? Susan was quiet while Charlotte talked. The baby gurgled occasionally and flexed his bare toes in the air. Charlotte thought to herself as she spoke that she couldn't remember the last time she went barefoot anywhere. She even showers with flip-flops on. Charlotte knew she probably sounded neurotic talking about all of these issues at once. But it felt good to voice them, even though

Susan was trying to hide a grin at times. This was reassuring, in a way. Charlotte mentioned everything she could think of, every little thing. Houseparties, even, which according to her personal mythology are a non-event until the day before and no earlier. In speaking these things, life and career and money and love and sex and work and family, Charlotte put some of them to rest for awhile. She hoped Susan would have answers for the others. Susan didn't; she didn't even pretend to know what to tell Charlotte. She didn't try to give advice or steer her or point out a path. She was quiet. Charlotte got nervous. Had she sounded like a fool? Should she be apologetic, or embarrassed? She said something to fill the silence: "Look at his toes wiggling in the sun like that. He must love the warm air. He's never felt it before, has he?" Susan turned to Charlotte and said, "No. This is his first spring." "He's so young." It was a silly, redundant thing to say, but Charlotte felt stupid for having whined for as long as she had about such crazy issues. Susan didn't laugh, though. She just said, "So are you." Charlotte stopped and listened to those words in her ears again. The world snapped back into some kind of form; it was spring, a blazing afternoon, an eager sun. A woman squatted by a sidewalk planting crocuses. Cars drove by with the windows down. There were even children setting up a lemonade stand. "Will you say that again?" Charlotte asked, catching up with Susan. "Whenever you want me to," Susan said, smiling.

Tom Petty flies high in Philly

By L.B. EISEN

It didn't matter that we had to wait for twenty minutes to use the restrooms. It didn't matter that our seats were the highest ones in the Spectrum. It didn't matter that I had to find an annoyed man from the event staff to kick four drunk teenagers out of our seats when we finally located our row. And it didn't matter that we had to pay five dollars for a beer. When Tom Petty strummed his guitar and belted out "She's a good girl, loves her mama, loves Jesus and America, too," it was all worth it. It was at that moment that I realized just how American Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers really are.

The Spectrum in Philadelphia was sold out, and I couldn't spot one empty seat in the entire place. Teenie boppers hopping in their seats, over-protective parents with their kids, dancing college students in baseball hats, long-haired bikers and strange-looking men in top hats trying to emulate Petty were all gathered together for a few short hours to listen to the man that most of them probably grew up listening to. It was an eclectic mix of people that all had one thing in common: their love for Tom Petty.

Petty started out with music from his new album, *Wildflowers*, but thankfully got back to his older music soon enough. And you can't listen to songs like "Free Fallin'" and "Last Dance With Mary Jane" without smiling and thinking about how great it is to be alive and young. He didn't play some of my favorite songs, like "Here Comes My Girl," "Don't Come Round Here No More" and "You Got Lucky" — but he did only have so much time. Petty's enormous repertoire couldn't possibly have been covered so extensively as to suit everyone's tastes.

But excitement was vibrating in the air. Petty himself noticed an unusual thrill in the audience. He commented that this was the best audience he had played for during his entire tour. One of the guys that came with us, who had been to Petty's concert in New York a few weeks ago, recalled that Petty didn't say anything like this at that performance. Yes, we were different. It made the night all the more special.

The smell of pot enveloped the stadium, and as the night progressed more and more people began to sit down to groove in their seats instead of dancing. Petty introduced a new song, "Driving to Georgia," which told the deep story of a man driving to Georgia and eating peaches. The song was pretty bad and the lyrics were worse, but we were at a Tom Petty concert and it didn't really matter. We continued to scream along with the audience about picking peaches from a tree in Georgia.

One more trip to the restrooms was in order, and I

found myself waiting in line talking to an overexcited teenage girl from Philadelphia who paid two hundred dollars for her third-row seat. Her face was bright red from dancing, and she couldn't stand still. I made my way back to the seats on the top level. Everyone around us seemed pretty comatose by this point. We danced anyway — it was more fun that way.



Courtesy of MCA Records

I was disappointed that Petty didn't make much of an effort to entertain the audience. I must admit that the best rock concerts are those in which the singer speaks to the audience, when it seems as if we're getting to know the performer. Billy Joel and Rod Stewart are definitely the most charismatic performers that I have ever seen: they joke and talk about their music and what it means to them.

Although Petty was disappointing in this aspect, he did make a funny remark in the middle of the concert: "There are rumors floating around that I abuse substances. I just want everyone to know that I am one hundred percent sober, but I'm high as a kite." It was just about the only thing Petty said during the show's two-and-a-half hours. Thanks, Tom. We could have guessed that. I was waiting to hear "American Girl," my all-time favorite Tom Petty song, throughout the entire concert. My friends kept trying to convince me to leave: "We should beat the crowd." "No," I responded. "We have to wait for 'American Girl.'" Petty left the stage and we screamed our lungs out for the goofy-looking man with long blond hair to reemerge. Petty's second encore was an amazing version of "American Girl." My faith in him was rewarded. I knew he wouldn't skip it.