

Triumph: Women Artists Win Slim Majority in Next Whitney Biennial

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An art-world wall has fallen. The [list of the 55 artists](#) to be included in the 2010 Whitney Biennial was made public this morning, and 52 percent of those artists are women. Depending on where you stand, hell has frozen over, or there's a fissure in the force. (The 2000 Biennial was made up of 36 percent women; in 2008, it was 40 percent.) When I asked curator Francesco Bonami about the unusually high percentage of women artists in his show, he said that he and associate curator, Gary Carrion-Murayari, "didn't look for women artists. They were just in front of our eyes. It wasn't conscious at all." He added that it was "misleading" to think about the upcoming Biennial "in these terms."

Perhaps. Still, the show will include excellent, newer, below-the-radar artists like performance chaos-creator Aki Sasamoto; Jessica Jackson Hutchins, whose arrangements of objects and ceramics create contradictory cosmic and formal storms; Kate Gilmore, who has been known to smash through Sheetrock walls while wearing party dresses and high heels; and Sharon Hayes, whose 2008 performance of her reading an imaginary letter about love and war on a midtown corner at lunch hour was one of the most powerful things I saw that year. Also on hand will be powerful under-knowns Babette Mangolte, Dawn Clements, Suzan Frecon, and Lorraine O'Grady, who has invaded art openings dressed in various guises, addressing issues of race and class."

The inclusion of all the women artists in this cattle call does not mean that the upcoming Biennial will be much better or worse than usual. Art exhibitions should never be about quotas. Still, in all likelihood, Bonami's 2010 Biennial will prove once and for all that women artists are no better and no worse than their male counterparts. Once this is acknowledged, we'll be able to get on with the business-as-usual of tearing the Whitney Biennial to shreds. Or not.



Photo: Jerry L. Thompson