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The 2014 Whitney Biennial Is Taking Shape

Art & Design: INSIDE ART

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Louise Fishman, *Ristretto*, 2013
Oil on linen, 70 x 60 in

The Whitney Museum of American Art announced nearly a year ago that a trio of outside curators would be organizing the 2014 Biennial, each taking a floor of the museum. Each brings a different set of eyes and interests to the show.

They are Stuart Comer, the chief curator of media and performance art at the Museum of Modern Art; Anthony Elms, an associate curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia; and Michelle Grabner, a professor in the painting and drawing department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, as well as an artist with an exhibition this month at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland. Elisabeth Sussman and Jay Sanders — the Whitney curators who put together the highly praised 2012 edition — will act as advisers overseeing the giant survey, which runs from March 7 through May 25 and takes the pulse of what's happening in contemporary art today.

As the biennial — the last in its Marcel Breuer building at Madison Avenue and 75th Street — takes shape, details about its content are finally emerging. For starters, the show will include the work of just over 100 artists and collectives, more than twice the number of the 2012 Biennial. And as with the previous edition there is no overarching theme.

“Each curator chose a floor and divided up the artists very organically,” said Mr. Sanders, adding that these decisions, as well as the content of the biennial itself, have been made by the three curators. “Having three perspectives means you will get a mix of performance and media,” he said. “Visitors will also get an eye into the curatorial process.”

As it has in the past, the selection of artists includes a multigenerational mix, including some whose careers span the decades (Robert Ashley, Sheila Hicks, Louise Fishman, Sherrie Levine); dead artists (Sarah Charlesworth, Gretchen Bender and Tony Greene); and a hefty dose of emerging artists. There will also be more artist collectives or collaboratives than ever before, a reflection of a growing trend.

While in 2012 the curators devoted one floor solely to performance, this time around performances will pop up in different spaces throughout the entire building. “They chose a different path,” said Mr. Sanders. “Each curator naturally found their own voice.”

Among the artists involved in dance are Miguel Gutierrez, Taisha Paggett and Yve Laris Cohen, while Kevin Beasley, Charlemagne Palestine and Sergei Tcherepnin are all doing sound pieces. There will also be contemporary “operas” from the 1970s, including one by Mr. Ashley in collaboration with Alex Waterman, and performance pieces by Ei Arakawa, working with Carissa Rodriguez, and the performance group known as My Barbarian.

In selecting the artists, certain trends are inevitably starting to emerge. Among them, Ms. Sussman and Mr.

Sanders said, will be a focus on artists involved in a multiplicity of disciplines, for instance writers who paint, painters who are also poets, filmmakers who create sculptures, and photographers who draw.

Craft seems to be part of the equation too. Lisa Anne Auerbach, a conceptual artist based on the West Coast, has knitted sweaters; artists including Shio Kusaka, John Mason and Sterling Ruby have made ceramic works. There will also be textiles by Ms. Hicks; tooled leather wall pieces created by Carol Jackson and woodworking from the sculptor Alma Allen.

As was evident at this year's Venice Biennale, there will be an emphasis on archival materials. Joseph Grigely, the artist, "got the archive of critic Gregory Battcock and will have vitrines showing all kinds of ephemera from it," Ms. Sussman said. Mr. Sanders added, "There's a definite response to new media." Triple Canopy, an online journal, will be presenting a project in the gallery and Semiotext(e) will also present a new series of publications.

In years past the Biennial has been criticized for the absence of painting, but Ms. Sussman and Mr. Sanders said there will be lots of it this year, especially works by abstract artists like Rebecca Morris, Molly Zuckerman Hartung, Laura Owens, Jacqueline Humphries, Louise Fishman, Amy Sillman, Suzanne McClelland, Etel Adnan, Dan Walsh and Elijah Burgher.

Frequently there is something outrageous to ogle. (In 2012, the Los Angeles artist Dawn Kasper [moved into the museum](#).) Mr. Sanders said it was still too early to say if there would be any off-the-wall moments because many of the performance projects are still being shaped.

There have also been years when the Biennial has extended beyond its own four walls, striking out into Central Park and once at the Park Avenue Armory. This year the multimedia artist Tony Tasset will be creating out an outdoor sculpture in Hudson River Park. "Hudson River Park is a place people actually use," Mr. Sanders said. "It also takes you outside the fray of the city."