

Clockwise from above, Olaf Breuning's "Army" (2008); Phoebe Washburn's "While Enhancing a Diminishing Deep Down Thirst, the Juice Broke Loose (the Birth of a Soda Shop)" (2008); Eduardo Sarabia's "Gift" (2008); and M K Guth's "Ties of Protection and Safekeeping" (2007-8).



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Advertisements for the 2008 Whitney Biennial promise a show that will tell us "where American art stands today," although we basically already know. A lot of new art stands in the booths of international art fairs, where styles change fast, and one high-polish item instantly replaces another.

## HOLLAND COTTER

### ART REVIEW

The turnover is great for business, but it has made time-lag surveys like the biennial irrelevant as news.

Maybe this is changing with the iffy economy. Several fairs, including Pulse in London, have recently suspended operation. And this year we have a Whitney show that takes lowered expectations — lessness, slowness, ephemerality, failure (in the words of its young curators, Henriette Huldish and Shaim M. Momin) — as its theme.

A biennial for a recession-bound time? That's one impression it gives. With more than 80 artists, this is the smallest edition of the show in a while, and it feels that way, sparsely populated, even as it fills three floors and more of the museum and continues at the Park Avenue Armory, that moldering pile at 67th Street, with an ambitious program of performance art (through March 23).

Past biennials have had a festive, party-time air. The 2004 show was all bright, pop fizz; the one two years ago exuded a sexy, punk perfume. The 2008 edition is, by contrast, an unglamorous, even prosaic affair. The installation is plain and focused, with many artists given niches of their own. The catalog is modest in design, with a long, idea-filled essay by Ms. Momin, hard-working, but with hardly a stylistic grace note in sight. A lot of the art is like this too: uncharismatic surfaces, complicated back stories.

There are certainly dynamic elements. A saggy, elephantine black vinyl sculpture by the Los Angeles artist

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