

The Whitney Biennial Invites Architecture In

THE Whitney Museum's 2002 Biennial exhibition, billed as one of the largest ever, has for the first time in more than 70 years opened its arms wide enough to include architecture. Three architects -- Lebbeus Woods, Laretta Vinciarelli and Javier Cambre -- and the Rural Studio architecture program join 113 artists, filmmakers, performance artists and others when the survey of the newest of the new in American contemporary art opens on March 7.

But this is more an architecture of ideas and commentary than of the built world. Mr. Woods is best known for his illustrations of imaginary -- and horribly real -- dystopias. Ms. Vinciarelli does minimalist watercolors. Rural Studio does create buildings, but its focus is also on building moral character in students. Mr. Cambre is an artist from Puerto Rico who has an architecture degree.

The architectural community was pleased to be included, but hardly excited by the Whitney's choices. "They represent a strain that is very beautiful, but not cutting edge," said Frederieke Taylor, who runs a small Manhattan gallery devoted to avant-garde architecture. She added that she didn't think of the well-known paper works by Mr. Woods and Ms. Vinciarelli as architecture at all.

Lawrence Rinder is the chief curator of the exhibition. He said he decided to include architecture this year because "the boundaries of art and architecture are so permeable." He added, "To ignore the presence of architecture across the threshold of contemporary art would be to deny a de facto situation in the art world."

His choices were guided largely by instinct as to works that fit in with his

lovine, Julie V. "The Whitney Biennial Invites Architecture In", *The New York Times*, February 21, 2002

organizational themes (being, space, tribes), he said, and by exhaustive studio visits. K. Michael Hays, the adjunct curator for architecture at the Whitney, was not consulted in this round-up of the usual suspects. (Mr. Rinder did allow that Mr. Hays had brought Ms. Vinciarelli to his attention.)

Mr. Woods trained as an architect and worked for Eero Saarinen, but in 1976 turned to theory, experiment and most notably to his signature sketches, searing renditions in colored pencil and ink. The Whitney is including a 2000 work, "Terrain," part of which proposes excavating bedrock skyscrapers out of a New York Harbor emptied of water.

Ms. Vinciarelli is even less active as an architect. The haunting purity of her watercolors reveals through a subtle haze only the barest lines of the most minimal spaces inhabited, as one architect said, only by light. Her works are highly regarded as art, and avidly collected by the Museum of Modern Art.

Javier Cambre is considerably less well known. He will be installing "Displaced," one-half of a beach shack concession taken from San Juan, with a modernist addition he has designed.

Founded by Samuel Mockbee, who died in December, Rural Studio sends architecture students of Auburn University to build homes for the poorest residents of Hale County, Ala. The structures, which blend modernist and vernacular features, are often built by hand and were heralded by the biennial selection committee as part of an "innovative training program."

Robert A. M. Stern, dean of the Yale School of Architecture, called Rural Studio "a sentimental favorite."

"The Whitney has a long history of devotion to social realism," he said, adding

lovine, Julie V. "The Whitney Biennial Invites Architecture In", *The New York Times*, February 21, 2002

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001
FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760

that at one time the museum made bolder choices, as when, in the 60's, it put on the first museum exhibition devoted to the work and theory of Robert Venturi. Mr. Stern described the inclusion of architecture in this year's biennial as "a nice form of tokenism."

Iovine, Julie V. "The Whitney Biennial Invites Architecture In", *The New York Times*, February 21, 2002

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001
FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760