

March 23, 2000

@largeBy MATTHEW MIRAPPAUL [BIO](#)**Now Anyone Can Be in the Whitney Biennial**

The [Whitney Museum of American Art](#), which mounts a highly selective survey of contemporary work once every two years, is showing its visitors this week just how far-reaching and fast-changing the Internet can be.

[RTMark](#), an online activist group whose Web site was chosen to appear in the 2000 Biennial exhibition, has altered its site so that Whitney visitors who try to view it will instead see a rotating set of Internet pages submitted by the public.

To date, about 20 pages have been sent in, including a Backstreet Boys tribute site, a plagiarized copy of the official New York City home page, a pornography site and the Whitney's own home page.

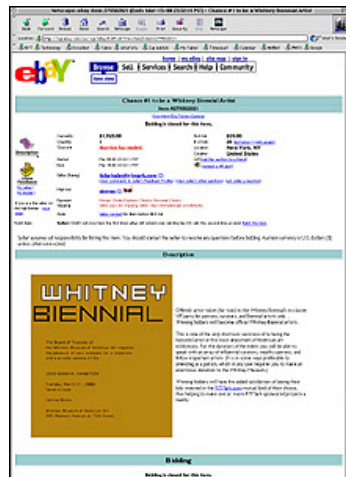
RTMark (pronounced ART-mark) seeks to criticize corporate behavior by mimicking it. In a phone interview, a group spokesman calling himself Ray Thomas (the group's five members are anonymous) said opening its part of the exhibit to the public would accomplish a very business-like goal: earning good will.

"Like a corporation would give out trinkets, we're giving out Whitney Biennial space," Thomas said.

Maxwell L. Anderson, the Whitney's cyber-savvy director and one of the Biennial curators, said in an e-mail message that "opening the site to submissions from the public is in accord with RTMark's concept, which is to provide an information brokerage -- with limited liability -- and public forum for Net activism."

RTMark did not notify the Whitney that it had modified its site, which normally presents a list of its activist projects, and the group's action would appear to breach an agreement the museum had asked Internet-based artists to sign. It stated that "links to the works of others will be removed prior to exhibition date." But Thomas said the group did not return its copy of the agreement, and Anderson said the altered site "doesn't violate any agreement."

The 2000 Biennial, which opens Thursday, is the first to include Internet-based works, with 9 of the 97 artists in the exhibition presenting online pieces. They can be viewed using a computer and



RTMark, a group of online activists, auctioned off tickets to a Whitney Biennial preview party online.

a projection screen in the Whitney's fourth-floor gallery or through the [Internet art](#) area of the museum's Web site. [Fakeshop](#), a group of digital artists who present live online performances, is also creating a special Biennial project in May, but with the museum's full knowledge.

As more museums start to incorporate works of Internet art into their contemporary-art exhibitions, RTMark's contribution demonstrates how difficult it is to control, not to mention curate, works in such a fluid medium.

Steve Dietz, director of new media initiatives at the [Walker Art Center](#) in Minneapolis, said: "It is a challenge, and it involves rethinking what the online exhibition might be. One of the ways for institutions to interact usefully with network-based work is to think of it not just as a virtual gallery, but as a platform for creation. In a sense, it's more parallel to commissioned performances, where the work is mutable."

To most Web surfers, RTMark's site appears unchanged. But the group has reprogrammed the site so that visitors accessing it from computers at the Whitney, or via a link on the Whitney site, are redirected to a new [Exhibit](#) area, where a new Web site will appear within a frame every few minutes. The group provides an e-mail address, show@rtmark.com, for those who want to submit a site to be displayed at the Biennial.



Links

[Web links of interest to arts@large readers.](#)

Forum

[Join a discussion on digital art.](#)

By mocking the value of its own participation in the Biennial, Thomas said, RTMark was delivering a message to artists. "If you're trying to be an activist, don't bother spending any time in the art scene. It doesn't have any significant effect on the real world. No politicians look to the art world to see what to do. Artists who want to be activists should be spending their time on the world."

In another poke at the Biennial's prestige, RTMark's members used [eBay](#), the online-auction site, to sell four tickets to a preview reception for Biennial artists and Whitney supporters. RTMark will use the \$8,400 it got for the tickets to finance one of its corporate subversion projects.

"We didn't actually want to go," Thomas said. "We might be able to make some money schmoozing people at an art reception, but people in that context aren't used to being asked for cash to finance sabotage."

The winning bidder, an artist using the name [Sintron](#), gave the tickets away to losing bidders who promised to send him the used ticket stubs and other memorabilia from the event.

Speaking on the condition that he not be identified by his real name, Sintron said he planned to use the objects in his art works, which tend to be narrative pieces based on real-world stories. In a phone interview last week, he said, "I'm not really interested in the party or the Biennial itself, but I know a lot of people are, and I think it would make a great story."

Sintron asked that RTMark use the money for its "Baby" project, which will attempt to convince a sportswear manufacturer to sponsor a child's upbringing in exchange for the right to tattoo it at birth with a corporate logo. Past RTMark-sponsored projects have included a parody of the George W. Bush presidential campaign site at the deceptively similar [GWBush.com](#) address and the covert addition of gay-themed content to the computer game [SimCopter](#).

Despite the Biennial's power to add luster to young artists' careers, Thomas said the group decided to use the exhibition as "a platform we could use in our own way, and not in an entirely careerist way."

This is an archived page.

[Report a problem](#)

"It's about not being in the show," he said. "It's just a waste of time trying to get ahead in that environment. There's so much more important stuff to do."

This is an archived page.

[Report a problem](#)

arts@large is published on Thursdays. Click [here](#) for a list of links to other columns in the series.

Related Sites

These sites are not part of The New York Times on the Web, and The Times has no control over their content or availability.

- [Whitney Museum of American Art](#)
- [RTMark](#)
- ["Internet art" area on the Biennial site](#)
- [Fakeshop](#)
- [Walker Art Center](#)
- [RTMark's "Exhibit" area for the Biennial](#)
- [eBay: One of four auctions of tickets to Whitney Biennial party](#)
- [Sintron](#)

Matthew Mirapaul at mirapaul@nytimes.com welcomes your comments and suggestions.

[Home](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Site Search](#) | [Forums](#) | [Archives](#) | [Marketplace](#)

[Quick News](#) | [Page One Plus](#) | [International](#) | [National/N.Y.](#) | [Business](#) | [Technology](#) | [Science](#) | [Sports](#) | [Weather](#) | [Editorial](#) | [Op-Ed](#) | [Arts](#) | [Automobiles](#) | [Books](#) | [Diversions](#) | [Job Market](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Travel](#)

[Help/Feedback](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Services](#) | [New York Today](#)

[Copyright 2000 The New York Times Company](#)