

**NOTICED**

# For 82 Artists, Immortality Is

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By JEAN NATHAN

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**W**HEN the Whitney Museum of American Art sent out letters three weeks ago to the 293 living artists in "The American Century: Art and Culture, 1900-2000," a two-part exhibition, inviting them to pose for a commemorative group portrait, no one quite knew what to expect. The R.S.V.P. process quickly dissolved into chaos. So on Thursday morning, there was little to do but just throw open the museum's front doors and watch the parade as some of the greatest artists of the last half-century marched or, in the cases of the wheelchair-bound Chuck Close and Nam June Paik, rolled in.

Of the 82 artists who made it, including Jasper Johns, James Rosenquist, George Segal, Richard Avedon, Jeff Koons, Laurie Simmons and Philip Pearlstein, all seemed to feel this was a command appearance, with Part 2 of the show, "1950-2000," opening today and running through Feb. 13.

Kara Walker, at 29 the youngest artist in the show, was the first to arrive, and she also traveled the farthest. Her trip had begun the day before with a flight from Los

Angeles to Providence, R.I., then continued early on Thursday morning with an early hop to Kennedy International Airport. At 8:30 A.M., she stumbled into the museum bleary-eyed. "You know what made me want to be here?" she said. "The suspicion that I'm going to die in obscurity. I thought I'd better show up."

Paul Cadmus, at 94 the oldest in the show,

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followed soon afterward, by train from Westton, Conn. "Six is awfully early for me to get up," he said, "but this is a very important occasion."

Nan Goldin had also arisen at 6 — to shower before the water in her Greenwich Village apartment was turned off for maintenance.

When Brice Marden, another Villager, was asked if he found the hour a little early,

he said, "No, but it's a little far uptown."

For many it was an emotional reunion of comrades-in-arms from the succession of late-20th-century art movements, including Abstract Expressionism, Pop and performance art. Mr. Rosenquist blew kisses in all directions, and many exchanged bearhugs. Jack Pierson, glancing at Mr. Cadmus, had awe in his voice when he said, "I can remember seeing his work in the Encyclopedia Britannica." Yoko Ono, in the show as a member of Fluxus, the avante-garde group, choked back tears as she described a realization that "each artist has had long struggles of pain and creativity and inspiration to come to this moment."

"Each artist is like an island alone," she added, "but when we get together we're one body. We make the latter half-century of the history of American Art. That's pretty heavy stuff."

Glenn Ligon expressed a similar feeling on a lighter note. Recalling how he'd awakened at 4 A.M. in Brooklyn in the throes of "photo anxiety," he went on to say he fell back asleep, but that when the alarm went off he told himself: "You better get your butt up there. It's historic."

# Worth Rising Early

Carolee Schneemann had told the Whitney she would not be able to attend because she was scheduled to teach at the University of Maryland. "I changed my mind," she said, a suitcase on wheels trailing her. "The photograph is going to endure, and the teaching we can replicate." Dennis Oppenheim, who arrived with his daughter Kristin Oppenheim, also in the show, agreed it was a must-attend. But his daughter "was so relaxed she wasn't going to come," he said, until he insisted. "I told her: 'Man, you have to come to this. It would be a bad career move not to.'"

Kiki Smith said she was feeling "crabby," which may have been because she was hauling 30 pounds of art materials, videos and other supplies, as she was on her way to teach a class at Bard College. Or maybe it was because that morning she had squeezed in a quick burial of her cat, who had died two days earlier.

At 9:45 A.M., Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, a photographer who has made a career documenting the art world, began the potentially dicey business of putting his subjects in their places, grouping them on and around a granite counter in the lobby. "My

## **For many, it was an emotional reunion of the important figures of 20th-century art.**

biggest dread was how to place people because of all the egos," he said later. If egos were bruised, it was not evident. Really, there wasn't a bad seat — or orange crate, stool, counter top or ladder — in the house.

"It's just amazing, just amazing," said Maxwell L. Anderson, the Whitney's director, as he surveyed the group from the sidelines. "It kind of looks like an American flag, doesn't it?"

Three times Mr. Greenfield-Sanders stopped the shoot to fit in stragglers. Ten minutes, five camera changes and 39 frames later, it was done. Three artists — Mark di Suvero, Billy Kluver and Ross Bleckner — arrived too late. "The traffic was beyond," said a cresfallen Mr. Bleckner, holding the set of vampire teeth he had planned to wear in the picture.

"History doesn't wait," Mr. Greenfield-Sanders said in a mock-chiding tone. "Even at the Whitney."