



Cavalry, 2007 Joe Bradley

their superabundant way, they were also irresistible. His 2002 funfest, *The Grand Machine/THEAREOLA*, which gets its own spacious room at the Whitney, is a meditation on '70s porn star Marilyn Chambers incorporated into a sort of ramshackle karaoke-CD factory.

What you won't find much of in this Biennial is painting—one reason the show starts to feel parched after a while. So it was with gratitude that I came across 75-year-old Robert Bechtle. Forty years ago, he emerged as one of the first photo-realists. Working from slides that he projected onto canvas, he produced "photographic" scenes of suburbia at its most prosaic, or of San Francisco streets at their most matter-of-fact and unpicturesque. It's customary now to compare him with Edward Hopper. Like Hopper, Bechtle has a gift for finding the melancholy note in sunlight itself, as well as for the abstract underpinnings of the world. In *Six Houses on Mound Street*, 2006, with its stark cubes and fretwork of painted crosswalks, the workaday scene seems to be held in place by the guy-wires of some enigmatic order.

Then there are Joe Bradley's big bright canvases, such as *Cavalry*, 2007, which combine the resolutely abstract boxes and

rectangles of Minimalist and color-field painting into cartoon-character formations. It's a bit of an art-history joke, and one that sculptor Joel Shapiro played with more than 20 years ago in 3-D. But Bradley's ferocious colors and color contrasts give his work a weirdly commanding presence, one made weirder still by all those infantile silhouettes.

Where this year's Biennial goes out on a limb is in the decision to devote a separate venue to shared social experiences defined as artworks. These include a 24-hour dance marathon, a Gypsy-themed feast and a slumber party. Momin and Huldish say this kind of evanescent "event art" is another manifestation of the recoil from the market, and that it's so widespread across the U.S. that no survey show can ignore it. To accommodate this, for its first three weeks, the Biennial is spilling over to the Park Avenue Armory, a Victorian brick pile a few blocks from the museum that offers room after room of wood-paneled

chambers with brass chandeliers and mounted moose heads. In other words, it's a party space. In one of the oaky rooms, the Los Angeles artist Eduardo Sarabia has opened a tequila bar. He made the blue-and-white-ceramic bar stand. He made the bottles. He even made the tequila. The press materials explain that it's not just a bar but an installation that "celebrates collaborative dialogue and community." In other words, a bar. You provide the hangover, your very own contribution to the "social performance" artwork.

Even evanescent events have a kind of art-history pedigree. Dada, the anti-art phenomenon that grew out of disgust for World War I, was as much a café phenomenon as it was an art movement. And more recently there has been Rirkrit Tiravanija, the Thai artist best known for cooking and serving meals for visitors at his gallery shows, at which the art was the shared experience of the meal. To serve and nourish, and to reflect on it while you are doing it, in a world that's gotten used to performance art—maybe that can be art too. But to party? We'll see. I've practiced that art myself. I had a great time, but I doubt that I did anything memorable. Or if I did, I can't remember it. ■



Steady Art Beat

Check out a video view of the Whitney Biennial hosted by Richard Lacayo at time.com