WHAT DOES ANNA WINTOUR WANT NEXT?

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WHY BARACK NEEDS BILL

BY PETER J. BOYER

PLUS:
NEIL ARMSTRONG'S DREAMS OF MARS
BY DOUGLAS BRINKLEY

KABOOM!
THE SOUND OF AMERICA'S INFRASTRUCTURE COLLAPSING
Borch, Guido Reni, and Adolphe Monticelli—the inspired brushman van Gogh hoped to equal.

The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York is one of the few major players that rarely puts big names on its schedule: its main fall show is about the underrated pop artist Richard Artschwager. But even in a museum where audience draw seems off the agenda, director Adam Weinberg admits that “we do pay attention to it—I don’t want to sound holier than thou.” He reminds me that the Whitney is careful to serve regular doses of its Edward Hopper holdings, and that a Warhol show is in planning. The danger, Weinberg says, comes when a museum’s balance is so off that “it becomes more like polling than like leading”—when a museum only ever confirms the tastes its audience already has, rather than also taking them to new places.

“it’s more evidence of the death spiral of museums,” says David Ross, former director of the Whitney and of San Francisco’s MoMA, and now head of a graduate program at the School of Visual Arts in New York. Today’s institutions are forced to shout out the same “show business” names, Ross says, because of the remorseless growth of their buildings and budgets, their faltering endowments, and a demand for earned income from corporate-minded trustees. At any but the richest institutions, he says, “the pressure is absolutely real and continual.” (Although unless very carefully handled, a blockbuster’s costs in insurance and fees can eat up any profits.) Ross says that when a director calls his staff to the table and cries “Our yield is in the shitter—help me here, gang!” smart curators come up with big-name events that can also be justified on scholarly grounds.

But then Ross softens, as we all do when faced with undeniable talent. Every generation needs its chance to come to terms with our greatest art heroes, he says. “As many times as I’ve seen Picasso, I can always go see another great Picasso show.”

**FOR SOMETHING DIFFERENT CHECK OUT THESE SHOWS**

**SEP. 21**  The Sultan’s Garden: The Blossoming of Ottoman Art at the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C. Tracking how Turkish textiles and ceramics came to have their classic flower motifs, this show won’t be huge but is sure to be packed with pleasure. To March 10.

**OCT. 7**  Al Weisel: According to What? at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in D.C. Because of his fearless activism, this Chinese artist has been more in the news than almost any of his peers. The Hirshhorn’s survey will let us take the measure of the objects Al makes. To Feb. 24.

**OCT. 25**  Richard Artschwager at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Artschwager was one of the geniuses of pop art, possibly up there with Lichtenstein and Warhol. His output has been so complex, and so varied, that he’s been unfairly neglected—until this new survey. To Feb. 3.

**NOV. 16**  This Will Have Been: Art, Love & Politics in the 1980s at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. Almost all of today’s art depends on work from the 1980s, and this show will be one of the first to assess that era. To March 3.

**ON THE IPAD**  Blake Gopnik’s video guide to the best fall exhibitions not on your radar.