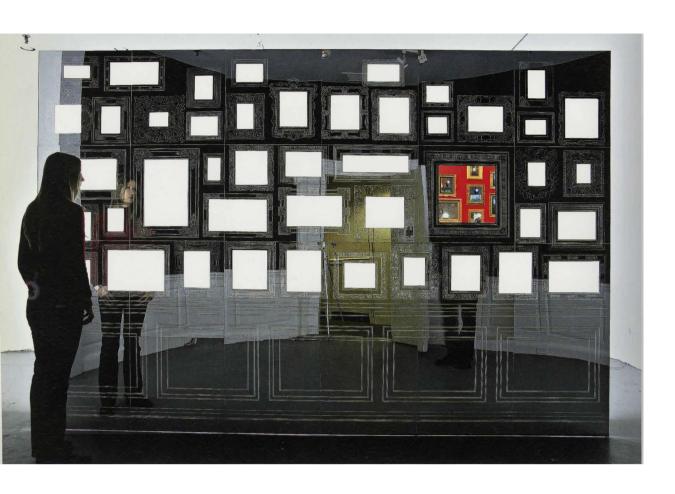
WHITNEY BIENNIAL 2008

ELLEN HARVEY



Born 1967 in Kent, England; lives in New York,

New York An artist with a keen sense of both art's potential and its limitations, Ellen Harvey was trained not only as a painter but also as an attorney, and fittingly her work balances an auteur's faith with a lawyer's skepticism. From her works for public spaces to her gallery-based practice, Harvey's belief in the communicative power of art is leavened by a commendable awareness—and even explicit acknowledgment—of the potential for failure, missed connections, and misunderstandings. Her willingness to contend with the possibility of malfunction in her own process strengthens rather than weakens it, opening up the mechanisms of inspiration and execution to productive interrogation.

After completing the Whitney's Independent Study Program in 1999, Harvey spent two years working in anonymity on her *New York Beautification Project* (1999–2001), a brilliantly simple guerrilla intervention into public space. She "tagged" various unloved bits of city real estate with small Hudson River style landscape vignettes, challenging accepted notions of vandalism by asking, in a disarmingly modest way, how certain artistic modes (and contexts) contribute to the calculus through which forms of expression are officially valued or scorned. Her projects in the following years tracked similarly thorny aesthetic questions. *A Whitney for the Whitney* (2003), for example, featured painted reproductions of each work in the Museum's then-recent catalogue, exactingly recapitulated in scale and displayed

in alphabetical order, re-creating a purposefully inadequate stand-in for the Museum's collection. Meanwhile, her interests in larger interventions continued apace; her work *Mirror* (2005) was an architecturally scaled project in which she engraved an uncannily beautiful, fine-lined doppelgänger of the grand staircase hall at Philadelphia's Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts onto a wall of mirrors she installed there, but she altered the "mirror image" to suggest an advanced state of ruin, projecting the latent dysfunction of individual works of art onto the edifice that contained them.

Harvey's latest major work combines the interests and forms of her recent projects. The ongoing *Museum of Failure* (2007)—a new elaboration of which is part of the Biennial—includes *Collection of Impossible Subjects*, a rear-illuminated plexiglass mirror wall hand-engraved with a salon-style exhibition of ornately framed, sanded-out rectangles. Visible through an opening in one of them is *Invisible Self-Portrait in My Studio*, a painting of an identical collection of frames, except that these hold paintings based on photographs the artist took of herself in a mirror where the image is obliterated by the camera's flash. It is a nuanced twin bill that probes conventional wisdom about the artist and the museum, about making and seeing.

Harvey will also be performing 100 Biennial Visitors Immortalized at the Armory, providing one hundred people with a free fifteen-minute portrait in exchange for their evaluation of the portrait's success. J.K.

Museum of Failure: Collection of Impossible Subjects & Invisible Self-Portraits, 2007 (installation views, Luxe Gallery, New York, 2007). Rear-illuminated hand-engraved plexiglass and aluminum frame, fluorescent lights, wall paint, and oil on canvas, twelve parts, in secondhand frames, 96×120 in. (243.9 x 304.8 cm). Collection of the artist



