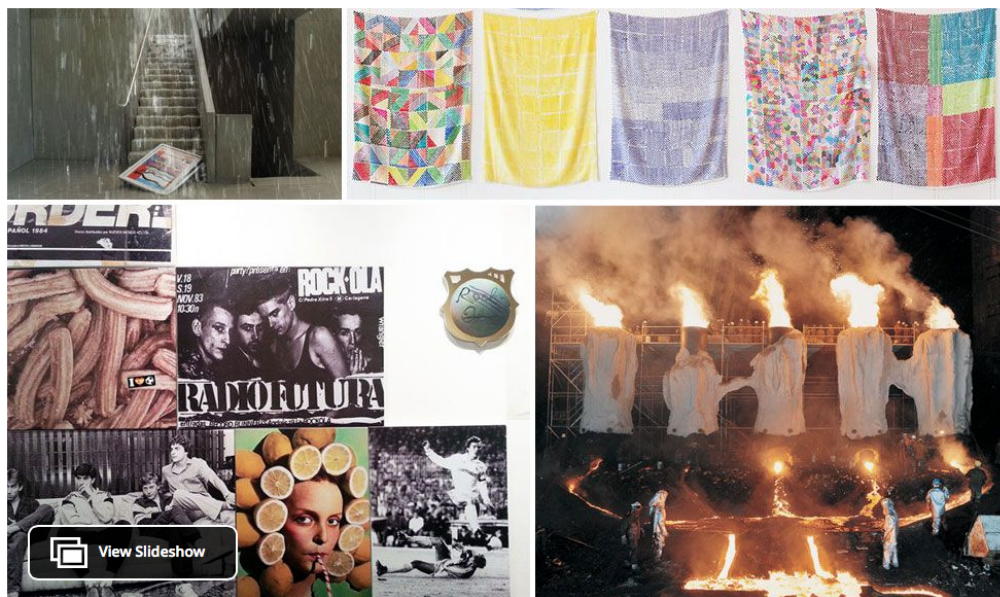


The Best Exhibitions of 2014

BY SCOTT INDRISEK | DECEMBER 23, 2014



Clockwise from top left: Judith Hopf's "Lily's Laptop", 2014; Polly Apfelbaum's 50 ink-on-rayon synthetic velvet panels; still from "River of Fundament"; installation view of "Wendy White: Madrid Me Mata"

(Courtesy the artist and Kaufmann Repetto, Courtesy of Andres Ramirez/Clifton Benevento, Hugo Glendinning, Courtesy of the artist and Art + Leisure)

From chickens in New York to cats and mannequins in Brussels and London, here's a very subjective list of the best that 2014's art world had to offer.

Sam Moyer at Rachel Uffner Gallery Incorporating marble and adding rich new layers to her compositions, "More Weight" found this young New York-based artist taking her game up a few notches. The massive, stage-like sculpture on the ground floor — which was used as the base for a night of performances — showed that she can pull off large-scale without sacrificing nuance.

Christopher Williams at Museum of Modern Art and David Zwirner

This American-born, German-based conceptual photographer is a whipsmart tour guide to his own body of work. I had the pleasure of interviewing him regarding his MoMA retrospective and attending a hilarious and informative walk-through of his Chelsea show: many fond memories of chickens, cars, and household products.

"Displayed" at Anton Kern Gallery

Where's the line between art and commerce? Is it possible for an exhibition to mull that question over in a way that's not didactic, bland, or boring? This Matthew Higgs-curated group show did just that, tackling art which incorporates "the languages of architecture, the museum, interior design, retail, and advertising," with pieces by Roe Etheridge, Diane Simpson, David Corty, and others.

The New Museum, in general

The institution thrilled this year, with sprawling, thematic group shows ("Here and Elsewhere") as well as killer solo efforts: Camille Henrot's videos and ikebana; Ragnar Kjartansson's musical squat; and Chris Offili's breathtaking survey, which is on view through January 25.

The NEWD Art Show

Independent Projects got a lot of well-earned press this year for being an alternative to the usual fair, but let's not forget the concisely curated, very enjoyable NEWD Art Show, staged last spring in Bushwick. Galleries like Regina Rex, Signal, Sardine, and American Medium gathered in a hulking space on Johnson Avenue. I imagine some of them actually sold art, which is a good thing, and the experience for the average spectator had none of the sulky malaise that fairs are normally so adept at producing.

Urs Fischer at Gagosian's Delancey Street Pop-Up

The thought of the world's most expansive international mega-gallery going raw on the Lower East Side might be cringe-inducing, but somehow Gagosian's installation of Fischer sculptures inside a battered former Chase bank worked.

"Supports/Surfaces" at CANADA

This survey of French work from the '60s was an eye-opener, and should have been a real "innovate or die" wake-up call to today's artists.

Mark Leckey at WIELS, Brussels

"Lending Enchantment to Vulgar Materials" was as noisy and frenetic as an arcade, incorporating sculpture, video, appropriation, inflatables, sound-systems, 3-D printing, high-end fridges, and much more. Both satirical and serious, it showcased the breadth of Leckey's practice and proved that it's possible to be wickedly smart while having (occasionally dumb) fun. It's up through January 11.

George W. Bush's "The Art of Leadership" at the George W. Bush Presidential Center, Dallas

Totally just kidding! The guy's a war criminal. And he could have at least had the chutzpah to include those eerily rendered shower-selfie portraits here. That said, I shall always cherish my visit to this little slice of alternate reality, where W was a competent, no-nonsense president; where his Sunday painting was a quaint hobby, perhaps to take his mind off the fun and games over at those CIA black sites; and where the gift shop comprised a total sculptural installation of its own, where the only books, baubles, and Bobbleheads worth having were all about George.

Polly Apfelbaum at Clifton Benevento

Markers, fabric, patterns, and patience: Apfelbaum's simple methods transformed this space. "I like it because it's not normal," she told me, describing the show itself. I heartily agree.

Sarah Charlesworth at Maccarone

Charlesworth's eye — for color, cropping, juxtapositions, and framing — was impeccable, and it was incredible to see the entirety of "Objects of Desire," a series the late artist made between '83 and '88.

Kai Althoff at Michael Werner Gallery, London

The artist's debut show with this gallery mixed mannequins, paintings, handmade sweaters, and drawings together in an appropriately low-lit, domestic space. It would have been great to see Althoff's decidedly atemporal output included in MoMA's "The Forever Now," but alas. He also wins major kudos for a press release that opens with the line, "Having turned into a heavily opinionated and high-strung personality, which seems to brood with anger that unloads fast, Kai Althoff wishes to create an antidote to this state of mind, by work that aesthetically calms the soul and seeks to feed a notion of shelter in an elegance reflecting the utilization of art in the homes of people with good taste and intellectual brilliance in times long passed."

Wendy White at Arts+Leisure

At this new Harlem space helmed by Freight+Volume's Nick Lawrence, Wendy White combined wall decals, ephemera, and paintings in a very personal and esoteric celebration of Movida Madrileña.

Matthew Barney's "River of Fundament" at Brooklyn Academy of Music

Ridiculously ambitious (and O.K., at times just plain ridiculous), Barney's five-plus hour epic is based on Norman Mailer's novel "Ancient Evenings." Not everyone loved it, to say the least, and its fecal undertones earned more than a few headline puns, but I found this strange beast well worth slogging through. If you happen to be in Tasmania you can catch it at the Museum of Old and New Art, with attendant sculptures, through April 13.

"Fixed Variable" at Hauser & Wirth

In a comparatively shoebox-sized side gallery, curators Madeline Warren and Yuta Nakajima assembled a stunning and concise Greatest Hits from the current crop of photographic experimentation, from Letha Wilson and Ethan

Greenbaum to Kate Steciw and Chris Wiley.

“DISOwn — Not For Everyone” at Red Bull Studios New York

This flashy “art exhibition posing as a retail store” hinted a bit at the bizarre contours the DIS-curated Berlin Biennial, taking place in the summer of 2016, might assume.

“Puddle, Pothole, Portal” at SculptureCenter

The Long Island City institution reopened its renovated and expanded space with this cartoon world-inspired exhibition. Co-curated by Ruba Katrib and Camille Henrot, it offset the colorful and surreal (Saul Steinberg; Jamian Juliano-Villani) with the disturbingly goofy (Danny McDonald) and the unsettling (Abigail DeVille’s enigmatic kinetic assemblage).

Basilica Soundscape

Not an art exhibition, per se, but art-adjacent, certainly, and one that came with unforgettable performances by Deafheaven, Majical Cloudz, White Lung, and Tim Hecker. Sterling Ruby contributed a stunning textile piece that acted as a stage backdrop (and he shared a very eclectic playlist with ARTINFO to celebrate the occasion).

Daria Irincheeva at Postmasters

The ex-director of Family Business gallery (and former aspiring astrophysicist) presented a deft range of sculpture mining common materials, some of it craftily pilfered from Home Depot.

The Rest

There’s more to life than what happens in our galleries and museums, obviously. This year I was thrilled to read Don Carpenter for the first time — his “Fridays at Enrico’s” was posthumously finished by Jonathan Lethem; to let Guided by Voices remind me that growing old doesn’t mean you have to stop kicking ass; to experience nostalgic suburban flashbacks courtesy of Young Jean Lee; to get washed away in a flood of rough, poetic monologue during “Howie the Rookie” at BAM’s Next Wave festival; and to remember that people still get angry over injustice.