

HYPERALLERGIC

ARTICLES

Best of 2016: Our Top 15 Exhibitions Across the United States

Here's a small taste of what this vast country had to offer in art this year.

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(photo of Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium at Carnegie Museum of Art by Elisa Wouk Almino/Hyperallergic)

This year, Hyperallergic writers and editors combed Philadelphia, Denver, Miami, Pittsburgh, and many other US cities to get a taste for what the country had to offer in its museums, galleries, and performance spaces. We found a number of retrospectives that revealed surprising or unexplored aspects of familiar artists, as well as surveys that revised art history as we know it. And, of course, there were the exhibitions timed for the election that in hindsight seemed to

already know we were headed for doom.

1. *Paint the Revolution: Mexican Modernism, 1910–1950* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Philadelphia)

October 25, 2016–January 8, 2017

The standard account of modern art in Mexico, which [this exhibition sets out to contextualize and complicate](#), revolves around the muralists José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaró Siqueiros, and Diego Rivera, with detours into Surrealism

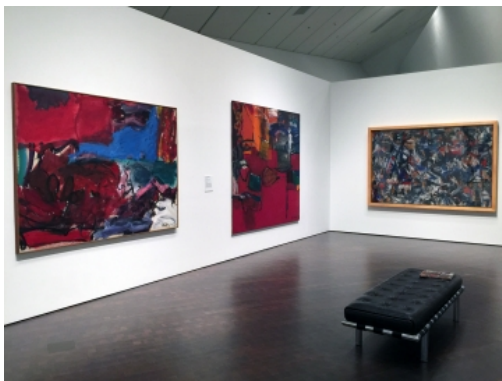


Ángel Zárraga, "Monkey Painter (Picasso Portrait)" (1916), oil on canvas (photo by Benjamin Sutton/Hyperallergic)

courtesy Frida Kahlo. Their works are included here, of course — with Rivera coming across as rather tame and didactic compared to his more visceral contemporaries — but what makes this show so fascinating is how it chronicles the many different ways that Mexican artists grappled with the perceived need to fashion some kind of identifiable national style or movement. In some cases this involved Mexican-izing the aesthetics of the European avant-garde, as seen in adaptations of Cubism from the 1910s; elsewhere this effort meant trying to extrapolate a stylistic system from the building blocks of ancient, native pottery in the 1920s and '30s. A connective thread that

really comes to the fore in the exhibition's final galleries, particularly through the anti-war prints and paintings of chaotic urban scenes from the '30s and '40s, is the way Mexican artists of the 20th century adapted both European and native spiritual imagery to grapple with the violence and progress brought on by modernity. —*Benjamin Sutton*

2. *Women of Abstract Expressionism at the Denver Art Museum (Denver)*



Works by Grace Hartigan, including "The King Is Dead" (1951) on right, in *Women of Abstract Expressionism* at the Denver Art Museum (photo by Hrag Vartanian/Hyperallergic)

June 12–September 25

It was an epic undertaking but clearly the time had come to make this happen. Gwen Chanzit brought together a dozen (mostly lesser known) female artists and worked to connect them to the larger history of Abstract Expressionism. The show started conversations around the world about the role of art history and how we should revise the written stories to ensure that women have a place in those histories. It was great to see artists we rarely get a chance to see (Judith Godwin was a particular favorite) but also seeing the work of well-known artists like Helen Frankenthaler and Joan Mitchell alongside their female peers. Chanzit did us all a favor with this show and I have a feeling it will generate a lot of new research (and rediscoveries) that we'll be noticing in the years ahead. —*Hrag Vartanian*

3. *Julio Le Parc: Form into Action* at the Pérez Art Museum Miami (Miami)



Inside the gallery that houses Julio Le Parc's "La Longue March (The Long March)" (1974), looking out towards the rest of the show (photo by Hrag Vartanian/Hyperallergic)

November 18, 2016–March 19, 2017

A gorgeous show, the Julio Le Parc retrospective was a perfect chaser to the chaos that we will face in the coming years. Bright, bold, and colorful, Le Parc never shied away from politics. He saw his abstraction as part of the continuum and it shows. Curator Estrellita B. Brodsky did an excellent job with the show, navigating the interest in the spectacle of Le Parc's work along with the strangeness of these low-tech objects that can jiggle, rotate, and disorientate. "If nothing is fixed anything is possible," the artist believes, and we need to hear that now more than ever, even if there are sinister undertones to those possibilities. Le Parc's democratic and anti-institutional voice comes through. As good as the show is, the

room that really shines is the one devoted to Le Parc’s “La Longue March (The Long March)” (1974), which is accompanied by a poem that feels as relevant as ever: “my own long search / with its zigzags / it’s unforeseen events / its expectations, it surprises / I didn’t know / but it was tracing its own course / unbeknownst to me / it was tracing its course for me.” —*HV*

4. Hélio Oiticica: *To Organize Delirium* at the Carnegie Museum of Art (Pittsburgh)



Installation view of Hélio Oiticica: *To Organize Delirium* at the Carnegie Museum of Art (photos by Elisa Wouk Almino/Hyperallergic)

October 1, 2016–January 2, 2017

By now [Hélio Oiticica](#)’s name is well known. But the breadth of his work, and the context in which it arose, is perhaps less familiar. [To Organize Delirium](#) is the second retrospective dedicated to the artist in the US, and the curators at the Carnegie Museum of Art [have done a beautiful job](#) presenting work that for the most part resists museum display. Visitors are welcome to enter Oiticica’s participatory installations and weave through his

mesmerizing, colorful sculptures, while music from [the Tropicália movement](#) plays in the background. The exhibition strikes a nice balance of being fun and inviting, while also rigorous in its scholarship. It is also the first show to delve into Oiticica’s overlooked years in New York City, which are detailed in the exhibition’s thorough catalogue. —*Elisa Wouk Almino*

5. *Procession: The Art of Norman Lewis* at Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (Philadelphia)



Norman Lewis, "American Totem" (1960),
oil on canvas (photo by Jillian
Steinhauer/Hyperallergic)

November 13, 2015–April 3, 2016

I don't think it's a stretch to say that, for me, [this exhibition](#) was a revelation. I knew little about Norman Lewis going in, and I chalked that up to my lack of interest in abstraction, which has always been predicated on a dubious belief that it's just not that political. But as Stan Mir wrote in his [Hyperallergic Weekend review](#), it turns out *most* people don't know enough about Lewis — he was written out of art history because he was black. As for abstraction not being political, well, Lewis's work deftly destroyed that idea. The retrospective showed him masterfully working his way through this question of how to marry, or not, his abstraction with his social and political concerns. For me, his most stunning pieces hover somewhere in between — abstract enough to fire up your imagination, worldly enough to point you where you're meant to go. —*Jillian Steinhauer*

6. *Kay WalkingStick: An American Artist* at the National Museum of the American Indian (Washington, DC)



Kay WalkingStick, "Night/O'RT (Usvi)" (1991), oil, acrylic, wax, and copper on canvas, 36.25 x 72.25 x 2 in (courtesy the Montclair Art Museum, purchased with funds provided by Alberta Stout)

November 7, 2015–September 18, 2016

It's incredible that [this exhibition](#) was the 81-year-old's first retrospective, but thankfully it was quite excellent — though don't get me started on the fact that an important contemporary artist of Cherokee descent is being given a retrospective in a museum better known for anthropological and historical displays.

WalkingStick's show easily glides between different disparate bodies of work, revealing an intense passion for painting in the 1970s, an interest in diptychs and duality in the '80s and '90s, and she continues to push herself until today. At the core of her work is the idea of landscape as something that doesn't simply appear like a photograph, with its seemingly objective gaze, but a relationship that unearths personal histories, archetypes, and stereotypes. Her art, like so much great art, seems to resist the notion of artistic evolution, as if we could forget the strands that we leave untied. Again and again she demonstrates that the act of creation is part of a continuing relationship and not only marked by a beginning and an end. —*HV*

7. *Andy Warhol: My Perfect Body* at the Andy Warhol Museum (Pittsburgh)

October 21–January 22, 2017

It's hard to believe that there is anything new to learn about [Andy Warhol](#). But [My Perfect Body](#) at the Warhol Museum makes the case that there is. This exhibition probes what we had already gleaned: Warhol's intense admiration for other people's looks and his self-consciousness toward his own. On display are the wigs he wore to conceal his balding, a plethora of beauty products, and the various corsets he wore after he was shot. He became obsessed with bodybuilding, and collected news clips of buff men in addition to making anatomical drawings. The



Andy Warhol's corsets in *My Perfect Body* at the Warhol Museum (photo by Elisa Wouk Almino/Hyperallergic)

content of the show is fascinating, and it is sensitively, never sensationally, presented. — *EWA*

8. *Carlos Motta: Histories for the Future* at the Pérez Art Museum Miami (Miami)

July 15, 2016–January 15, 2017



Carlos Motta, "Nefandus Trilogy" (2013), gold washed silver and tumbaga washed silver, dimensions variable (image courtesy the artist; Galeria Filomena Soares, Lisbon; Mor Charpentier Galerie, Paris; and Instituto de Visión, Bogotá)

In Carlos Motta's short film, "Nefandus" (2013), two men, traveling by canoe down the Don Diego river, discuss the nature of cultural erasure and the *pecados nefandos* (the abominable sins) that occurred in the Americas — specifically, the acts of homoeroticism that have been largely excluded from history, effectively erasing an entire people. Motta's *Histories for the Future* examines this period of conquest of the Spanish conquistadors (1492–1898) and its

missing histories, lending a voice to the thousands killed for their "crimes" of non-heteronormative sexual practices. In "Towards a Homoerotic Historiography," Motta has made a series of small vitrines housing tiny gold figures engaged in sexual acts. The viewer moves through a short hallway, flanked on either side by these small bodies, many of them recreations of indigenous objects destroyed during the conquests. Their size forces you to lean in close, to acknowledge them. In creating new histories, Motta's committed the most radical act of all: raising a truth from the dead. —*Monica Uszerowicz*

9. *Kathryn Andrews: Run for President* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (Chicago)



A view of Kathryn Andrews's *Run for President* at the MCA Chicago (photo by Hrag Vartanian/Hyperallergic)

November 21, 2015–May 8, 2016

Judging by [her exhibition](#), Kathryn Andrews seems to think the US Presidential process is a joke, like a strange ritual that millions of people engage in, in order to feel a sense of connection to one another. That connection is fleeting and contrived though, filled with the illusions of Hollywood and carnivalesque sculptural forms. Andrews focuses on the image of Presidential elections the most, and her “October 16” (2012) is a metaphor for the cyclical and fleeting nature of authority in American democratic culture. The owner of the work can add freshly filled helium balloons to it on its birthday (the title of the work), which is, of course, a few weeks before Americans go to the ballot boxes. Her show makes you almost forget about the real power a US President wields as the most powerful person in the world. The question may be who is laughing at whom. — HV

10. *Converging Lines: Eva Hesse and Sol LeWitt* at the Cleveland Museum of Art (Cleveland)



Foreground: Eva Hesse, "Accession V" (1968), galvanized steel and rubber; background: Sol LeWitt, "3 x 3 x 3" (1965), painted wood (photo by Jillian Steinhauer/Hyperallergic)

April 3–July 31

Conventional wisdom has it that the lines of influence move in one direction. But real relationships are based on two-way exchange, so that sometimes the teacher learns from the student, the boss from the worker, the old from the young. The curator of [this exhibition](#), Veronica Roberts, dispensed with the outdated notion that, because Sol LeWitt was an older male mentor to Eva Hesse, he impacted her art and not the other way around. What a breath of fresh air! Using a wall drawing made by LeWitt immediately after Hesse's death as a conceptual starting point, the show brought together a tight selection of works by both artists. Happily, the goal seemed to be less about pinpointing and proving Hesse's influence directly and more about demonstrating the pair's ongoing exchange. Standing in the galleries felt like being privy to an artistic conversation — one that was thoughtful, playful, and bidirectional. —JS

11. *Material Effects* at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum (East Lansing)



Installation view of *Material Effects* at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum (photo)

by Sarah Rose Sharp/Hyperallergic)

November 6, 2015–April 8, 2016

Six artists cannot possibly represent a place as vast and many-layered as Western Africa, but *Material Effects*, curated by Yesomi Umolu, did an impressive job of transporting a faraway culture to the MSU Broad in Michigan with coffee sacks, geometric wooden translations of traditional garments, and the anatomy of a kolanut plant. The gallery was alive with performances by artists who had traveled from West Africa, like Jelili Atiku who reinforced his overtly political practice with dancers in a series of stark red garments, and Bernard Akoi-Jackson’s cheeky opening night performance, which replicated a sense of labyrinthine and inexplicable bureaucratic rituals. Most remarkable was the multi-media, two-story installation “Post No Bill” a two-story scrim of much-used coffee sacks, overlaid with an audio feed, by Ghanaian artist Ibrahim Mahama. The immersive and fantastic nature of the exhibition did much to confirm Senegalese artist and materialist Issa Samb’s thesis and conceptual foundation for the show—presented in a documentary screened the show—that these objects contain a discernible power, one that may be used to seed connections between cultures a world apart. —*Sarah Rose Sharp*

12. *The Pursuit of Abstraction at the Wolfsonian–FIU (Miami Beach)*



Sexto Canegallo, “Energia sociale” (“Social Energy,” 1920), oil on canvas (photo by Benjamin Sutton/Hyperallergic)

October 14, 2016–April 16, 2017

This dense and eclectic exhibition gives some love to the countless early-20th century art movements rooted in figuration, narration, and spiritualism that have been relegated to obscurity by the dominant, abstraction-obsessed narrative of the

art from that period. Unsurprisingly, many of the artists who stand out here as being unfairly sidelined are women, from the stylized portraiture of the Canadian Henrietta Shore and the quasi-Futurist compositions of Irish artist Mary Swanzy, to the subdued, landscape-based Surrealism of the American painters Helen Lunderberg and Virginia Berresford. To be sure, *Pursuit of Abstraction* features a few familiar names, including a stunning theater curtain painted by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and a pair of dazzling lighthouse paintings by O’Keeffe — Georgia’s younger sister Ida Ten Eyck, that is — but what’s most refreshing about it is how the show enriches and expands the conventional account of European and American modern art between 1900 and 1950. —BS

13. Matthew Angelo Harrison: Detroit City/Detroit Affinities at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (Detroit)



Matthew Angelo Harrison: Detroit City/Detroit Affinities at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (photo by Corine Vermeulen, courtesy the artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery)

September 9, 2016-January 1, 2017

During the run of his [exhibition](#), Detroit-based Matthew Angelo Harrison often could be found in the gallery-as-studio tinkering with three-dimensional printers he constructed from low-tech parts. Though his DIY printers are sculptures in their own right, Harrison employed them to print objects such as African masks. An important part of the exhibition

involved Harrison discussing his work and often his relationship to it or lack thereof — for instance he is African-American not African. Overall, the exhibition leans towards embracing the possibilities inherent in new technologies — indeed Harrison works for Ford Motor Company — while not eschewing how race, class, exploitation, and appropriation are always attendant concerns in the relationship between maker, viewer, and object. —*Alpesh Kantilal Patel*

14. The Hinterlands: The Radicalization Process at Play House (Detroit)



Hinterlands Ensemble, *The Radicalization Process* (Alverno Presents/Kat Schleicher Photography, courtesy Hinterlands)

April 21–May 7 & September 28–October 8

The latest work by experimental performance ensemble, [The Hinterlands](#), is a piece of interactive theater two years in the making titled [The Radicalization Process](#). It presents the following thesis: “The only war that matters is the war against the imagination; all other wars are subsumed in it.” This concept rings truer every day, as we witness a dismantling of truth at the highest levels of our society and media, and *The Radicalization Process* is a complex interweaving of historical research, theatrical training, and the human stories that mount into epic acts of resistance and rebellion. The Hinterlands were at their razor-sharp best, with an [energetic performance](#) at Play House that pushed the four walls in every direction, forcing the audience to reconcile questions of good and evil, duty and revolt, and real or fabricated truth — a rigorous workout for the imagination, a tool we could all stand to sharpen in the war that rages around us. —SRS

15. R. Luke DuBois: Now at Bowdoin College Museum of Art (Brunswick)

March 31–September 4

[R. Luke Dubois’s exhibition](#) has been traveling around the US for the past few years but I finally got to see it at Bowdoin College in Maine and boy am I glad I did. By mining dating data, Facebook info, Playboy centerfolds, and Presidential speeches (among other things) Dubois creates sophisticated infographics that approach the scope of a new type of history painting, one that steps back to allow the subject to reveal itself through data sets and the eyes of others. But the piece that really set this show apart for me was his “SSB” (2008), which is a generative sound work that uses a recording of soprano Lesley Flanigan singing the US national anthem and stretches it to last four years — one US Presidential cycle. It



The hall that houses the Bowdoin Murals and R. Luke Dubois's "SBB" (2008) sound work (photo by Hrag Vartanian/Hyperallergic)

had a haunting effect in the grandeur of the room that houses the Bowdoin Murals, which commemorate four great classical cities in the Western tradition (Athens, Florence, Rome, and Venice). "SSB" evokes many auditory comparisons, including the adhan, the Islamic call to prayer, but I saw it as a type of cry for help. It sounded like a wailing voice confused at the state of America today. —*HV*

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