



Chocolate Sculpture, Gauguin, Censorship

Rising above the fury in the art world and moving ahead.

THIS WAS A YEAR of outrage: outrage at injustices beyond the art world, but too often misdirected inward. Disputes over aesthetics and politics frequently devolved — thanks to the accelerator of social media — into shaming and outright censoriousness. Building a better future, together, is going to be arduous work that will require the intelligence, the ambition, and, above all, the seriousness shown by exhibitions like these.

1. CERCLE D'ART DES TRAVAILLEURS DE PLANTATION CONGOLAISE As matters of identity and inequality rolled so many American museums, the small, vital SculptureCenter in Queens mounted a resounding defense of both cross-cultural partnership and moral sincerity. The sculptors of this collective work on a rural Congolese cacao plantation; their solid, clever statues are 3-D-scanned by a Dutch team, cast in chocolate in Europe and then shown and sold in galleries they will never be able to see. The museum's prestige helps these sculptures obtain high prices, which has made a concrete improvement to these artists' lives, but the works' true value, both economically and culturally, as chocolate and as art, depends on global disparities that no exhibition can remedy. This was the most challenging show of the year, and proudly "problematic," but that was the point: You need to be fearless, and run right into the swamp of possible misunderstanding, to have any hope of making a difference.

2. 'GAUGUIN: ARTIST AS ALCHEMIST' The paintings were here and accounted for, but it was the ceramics, wobbly and wild, that stole the show in this profound rewriting of Post-Impressionism at the Art Institute of Chicago. This vibrant exhibition gave us a new Gauguin, more complicated and more omnivorous than the South Seas stereotype. It was also a paragon of how to engage with the work of great artists whose personal behaviors make us bridle: unflapably, with the sharpest tools.

3. KAARI UPSON At 45, this intrepid Californian is looking more and more like the most psychologically incisive artist of her generation. Her uncanny exhibition at the New Museum, replete with casts of mattresses and more than a hundred mannequins of her mother, arrayed on the shelves Costco uses, plunged deep into the intertwined American obsessions with self-improvement and home improvement. Ms. Upson also made one of the strongest contributions to this year's Whitney Biennial: urethane casts of sectional sofas from Las Vegas tract houses, which appeared less like furniture than like misshapen human bodies.

4. 'PACIFIC STANDARD TIME': THE HISTORICAL SIDE Contemporary art accounts for the bulk of the Latin American exhibitions now filling Los Angeles, but two showcases of older work dazzle. "Golden Kingdoms," at the Getty Center through Jan. 28, is a bona fide blockbuster of pre-Columbian bling. "Painted in Mexico, 1700-1790: Pinxit Mexici," at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art through March 18, assembles an exhilarating bounty of altarpieces and portraiture. Both tour to the Met next year.

5. MILAN'S FERTILE FOUNDATIONS This year's Venice Biennale was a washout, but



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MUSEUM ASSOCIATES/LACMA — FLORENCE CULTURAL BANANEX, A.C., BY FRANCESCO KOCHEN

westward, two private museums scored winners. At the Fondazione Prada, the Polish artist Francesco Vezzoli curated an ingenious history of Italian public television of the 1970s, mixing shimmying showgirls with footage of feminist protests and the murder of a prime minister. And the massive HangarBicocca presented a devastating exhibition of the Polish polymath Mirosław Balka, whose whirling fans, hallways slicked with soap, and pumps of coal-black water circled around, but never disclosed, the horrors of the Holocaust.

6. PARIS: THE LIVING EARTH While the climate accord signed in Paris was punctured this year, the city's art world went green. At the Grand Palais, the lush exhibition "Jardins" gathered 500 years of garden designs, herbariums, landscaping tools and botanical art by Delacroix, Klee, Matisse and Gerhard Richter; the garden, it proposed, was the site where nature and culture marry. And at the Palais de Tokyo, Camille Henrot's brilliantly assured midcareer retrospective, through Jan. 7, includes not just a landmark new film, shot partly in the island nation of Tonga, but also Ikebana arrangements of dried flowers and scrap metal.

7. 'FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE AND THE BIRTH OF IMPRESSIONISM' In a strong year for the National Gallery of Art, the standout show was this nearly complete summation of the life of a realist painter who shared a studio with Monet and was on his way to greatness when he died, at 28, in the Franco-Prussian War. Bazille brought a bracing objectivity to scenes of bathers, parties and his fellow artists, and it is wrenching to think of what he did not paint.

Left, Cedrick Tamasala's "How My Grandfather Survived" (2015), foreground, and other sculpture by Congolese artists cast in chocolate. Below right, "Virgin of Sorrows (La Virgen de los Dolores)," circa 1750, attributed to Nicolás Enriquez at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Below left, works by Kaari Upson at the Whitney Biennial.

8. 'ART AND CHINA AFTER 1989' The disgraceful threats of violence that led to the censorship of Huang Yong Ping, Xu Bing and the couple Sun Yuan and Peng Yu at the Guggenheim Museum further reaffirmed that the world's two most powerful nations can barely make sense of each other. There is, though, no separating the United States and China going forward — and we need exhibitions as engaged as this one (through Jan. 7) to stake a claim for mutual recognition.

9. 'ANNE TERESA DE KEERSMAEKER: WORK/TRAVAIL/ARBEID' This Belgian choreographer's five-day "exhibition" in the atrium of the Museum of Modern Art was a model of how to translate dance from the set format of a theater to the open spaces and schedules of a museum. It was also an unabashed showcase of practice and expertise — watch them stick every landing, in sync, hour after hour — in an art world not usually bothered about skill.

10. 'THE SQUARE' In Ruben Östlund's Palme d'Or-winning satire — perhaps the first movie to depict the world of contemporary art with true insight — a Swedish curator imagines that an exhibition can improve society, and ends up making everything worse. The inane art-speak, the awkward fund-raisers, the drinking, the Teslas: This brutal indictment of the liberal culture sector ridiculed me and everyone I know, and it hurt so good.

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"Mnouchkine is regularly ranked as one of the world's most influential directors... [Théâtre du Soleil] seem unable to make theatre that is anything less than epic." —The Guardian (UK)

"...one of the world's greatest theater artists"
—The Financial Times (UK) on Mnouchkine

A ROOM IN INDIA

