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The 10 Best Art Shows of 2015

By **Jerry Saltz**

This week, Vulture will be publishing our critics' year-end lists. Monday we ran TV and movies. Tuesday covered albums, songs, and books. Today, look for theater, art, and classical performances.

1. Whitney Museum of American Art

A lot of hope, and that much more pressure, was riding on the Whitney to get its downtown move right and not blow all the good faith invested in this perennial we-try-harder institution. The Whitney didn't make it easy to love it either. Its Jeff Koons blowout in 2014 tested the most faithful (though the museum did pull it off). Ditto the announcement that the current retrospective of another divisive white male art star, Frank Stella, would be its maiden big-time survey in the new building. But the space is wonderful for art, even if it looks like a pharmaceutical building from the outside. In fact, this schism between great inside and so-so outside is a possible harbinger for other museums: Get the space for art right, and goodwill should follow.

2. Cheyney Thompson, "Birdwings and Chambered Shells" at Andrew Kreps Gallery

Cheyney Thompson's sixth solo painting show at this gallery — with its systemized colored dots and dashes arranged in patterns that are just beyond the grasp of cognition but scintillate the eye, the mind, and mingle with processes that feel primary and ever-changing — made me want to marry one of these paintings.

3. "Margret: Chronicle of an Affair — May 1969 to December 1970" at White Columns

One of the most pathos-filled photography shows of the year was this one, by "Günter K," an anonymous married 39-year-old Cologne businessman, and the Lolita-like object of his desire, "Margret S," his 24-year-old secretary.

4. Hito Steyerl: Artists Space

For a wild look at what "the expanded field of cinema" might mean in the future, look no further than this brilliantly visual, powerfully political artist who uses scenes of aircraft boneyards in California, an interview with an eccentric American entrepreneur, and CGI clips, all blended into incredible optical essays about information, power, the movement of capital, logarithms of the mind, and the human body.

5. Leidy Churchman at Murray Guy

What skill, touch, sensibility, sensitivity, and insight lay in Leidy Churchman's achingly earnest realistic paintings that give us imagined landscapes, deep-sea creatures, real-estate palaces in the Manhattan sky — symbols that seem to uncover the tracks of modern life to things fundamental, urgent, and alluring.

6. Betty Tompkins at Foundation University Gallery

Thank God a younger generation of artists is rediscovering the incredibly excellent Betty Tompkins, who, in the 1960s, at the exact moment Chuck Close was commencing his giant face paintings, was making huge photo-realist close-up depictions ripped straight out of straight-male porn magazines, I like Tompkins way more than Close, not just for the porn but for how she reveals the secret lives of women's tremendously intense vision.

7. Jamie Isenstein at Andrew Kreps

Jamie Isenstein's tricky, surreal, performative sculptures lit me up. I loved her banal-looking bed that looked to me like someone may have been inside it, occasionally rippling the sheets.* Since she started showing in 2004, I don't think I've ever seen a work by this 40-year-old that didn't make me momentarily stop and get wonderfully flummoxed.

8. Ann Toebbe at Monya Rowe

Sadly, Monya Rowe closed her fine Lower East Side space this summer, after operating in town since 2003. One of her final shows was replete with the spatially layered, fine-toothed realism of Ann Toebbe, whose paintings depict domestic interiors she's inhabited with family and friends. Her inner Vuillard mingles with cryptic color and Escher-like space.

9. Jackie Saccoccio at 11R

Jackie Saccoccio's double painting show of large dripped, brushed, slushed, and sluiced canvases of almost-undersea phosphorescent color showed how far out in front of the painterly curve this artist has been for more than a decade.

10. Cobra at Blum & Poe

Blum & Poe, the Los Angeles-based powerhouse gallery, scored big in its building-filling slice of one of the least-known mid-century postwar European art movements: Cobra. The show was organized by one of the smartest, most independent independent curators anywhere, Alison Gingeras, making it that much juicier. (Follow her on Instagram and she'll toss you the keys to other tastes.)

Also excellent:

James "Son Ford" Thomas at 80 WSE Gallery

Hilary Harnischfeger at Rachel Uffner Gallery

30 / 130: Thirty Years of Books and Catalogs, etc. Bob Nickas at White Columns.

Susan Cianciolo at Bridget Donahue Gallery

Katy Grannan at Salon 94

Math Bass at PSI

Alice Mackler at Kerry Schuss Gallery

Brigid Berlin at Invisible Exports Gallery

EJ Hauser at Regina Rex

H.C. Westermann at Venus Over Manhattan

Enrico Baj at Luxemburg Dyan

Wolfgang Tillmans at David Zwirner

Chris Ofili at the New Museum

Tom of Finland at Artists Space

Sarah Charlesworth at the New Museum

All Back in the Skull Together at Maccarone Gallery

Richard Serra at David Zwirner

K8 HARDY, Outfitumentary at Reena Spaulings (JAN 25, 2015)

Jannis Kounellis; Untitled (12 Horses) at Gavin Brown's Enterprise

Christine Kim in PSI

Aki Sasamoto Food Rental on the Highline

Robert Ryman at DIA

Lucy Dodd at David Lewis Gallery

Plus, shout-outs to two great spaces and places: Karma, New York and Greenwich Pottery House.

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