

VULTURE

The 19 Best Art Shows of 2014

By Jerry Saltz, 12/10/2014 at 1:25 PM

This week, Vulture will be publishing our critics' year-end lists.

1. Emma Sulkowicz, *Carry That Weight*, at Columbia University

Art is born of many things, among them righteous indignation, messianic rage, and the drive for justice. Emma Sulkowicz's powerful performance piece *Carry That Weight* comes from all these places and from great activist art as well, highlighting not just her trauma but the way Columbia turned a blind eye to it. Sulkowicz's gesture is clear, to the point, insistent, adamant. Since September, she's simply carried around campus, alone or with the offered help of others, a 50-pound mattress identical to the one on which she says she was raped. Enough said. The world heard, yet Columbia continues to look the other way; Sulkowicz continues to perform. *Carry That Weight* may not result in justice, but it may make universities think twice before looking past the plight of women. This work is pure radical vulnerability.

2. Richard Prince, "Instagram Pictures," at Gagosian Gallery

All the prim art-police Tweedledums and Tweedledees were shocked, shocked, by Richard Prince's crawling into the gap between Instagram and art, branding him — and anyone who didn't share their alarm — "sexist." Prince shot the sheriff; too bad he didn't shoot all the little self-appointed dignity-police deputies.

3. Kara Walker, *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby, an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant*, at the Domino Sugar Refinery

This great artist, who struggles mightily with her extraordinary signature form — of the black-paper silhouette — always looking for ways to expand this limiting medium, burst free into three immense dimensions with this spectacular sculpture made of sugar. It should be placed permanently on the National Mall as a monument to America's original sin of slavery.

4. Klara Liden, "It's Complicated," at Reena Spaulings

Sometimes I wonder whether Klara Liden isn't one of the best and most uncanny artists alive. For a decade, she has specialized in stripped-down, odious-sublime, jackal-in-the-night installations, and the video in this show was one of the strangest I've ever seen: four minutes of the strong, stiff, boyish-looking artist practicing ballet with real ballerinas at the Hermitage Theatre. Liden embodies displacement, intensity, the desire to move like a swan when one is a shaman, and the ability to blend in, stand out, and disappear at the same time.

5. Greer Lankton, "Love Me," at Participant

This extraordinary, museum-level labor of love devoted to the transgender artist Greer Lankton — a standout in the East Village art scene at the time of her death in 1996 — included an array of the artist's poignant, meticulous dolls, plus many amazing drawings, collages, photographs, and other ephemera. The show breathed the air of art, life, sex, and love. The sheer commitment of Participant founder-director Lia Gangitano is one of the things that makes the New York art world so special.

6. Darja Bajagic, "C6ld C6mf6rt," at Room East

This debut solo show is by an artist who says the dean of the Yale School of Art called her "crazy" and claimed

that she was sick for “being okay, as a woman, with these kinds of images even existing in the world, let alone propelling them in paintings and in the gallery system.” Bajagic harnessed dark forces in paintings and shadowy collages that bring together sex, violence, loneliness, fantasy, and imagination, and in one show, she joined the artists Elaine Cameron-Weir, Andra Ursuta, Dawn Kasper, Lucy Dodd, and others in a strain of feminism that takes no prisoners and is thankfully and unapologetically upon us.

7. Park McArthur, “Ramps,” at Essex Street Gallery

Portable sculptures of ramps, many with hinges or collapsing parts for easy storage or deployment, many ready-made for wheelchairs to reach interiors that are above street level, and all built or purchased by this disabled artist — an amazing experience of activism and jerry-built ingenuity. Homely objects double as invisible lifelines and conduits between worlds. One of the sharpest artists to emerge in the past few years.

8. Bill Lynch, at White Columns

This late artist was unknown to me before artist Verne Dawson curated this large show of haunting paintings, all with wonderful touch, verve, spiritual depth, succulent florets of oil paint, plant forms, and exotic birds.

9. Martina Kubelk, Independent Art Fair/Galerie Susanne Zander

If I could ask one wealthy person to fund one European dealer in New York, it would be Galerie Susanne Zander, who shined at the last two Independent Art Fairs. This year, she brought a cache of more than 380 small found photos, mostly Polaroid pictures, made between 1988 and 1995 by a cross-dresser who called herself Martina Kubelk. I marveled at this middle-class hausfrau of about 50, alone in her parlor, kitchen, and boudoir, wearing grandma dresses, sweaters, micromesh black stockings, always posing demurely, never in a sensational or exhibitionist way. Please, won't some prescient museum buy all of these pictures and put them on permanent display? They're magic.

10. The Shows at 80 Washington Square East Gallery

This NYU gallery joins White Columns in its commitment to art from anywhere. Generating enormous creative energy and aesthetic pleasure, in this season alone, the amazing director of this space, Jonathan Berger, hosted Michael Stipe's amazing project involving scads of students probing visual mysteries, and a show devoted to gay-porn photographer Bob Mizer. It would be hard to overstate how rare it is for any university exhibition to rise to these heights.

11. Susan Te Kahurangi King, Chris Byrne and Marquand Books at the Outsider Art Fair/Andrew Edlin Gallery

Susan Te Kahurangi King, born in the early 1950s, does not speak, but she draws like a Disney-inspired angel. The first time her work was ever seen outside her native New Zealand gave us fabulous graphite and colored-pencil, crayon, and ink conglomerations of Donald Duck, Willem de Kooning, Jim Nutt, Roy Lichtenstein, and Carroll Dunham. More, please.

12. Marie Lorenz, Jack Hanley/Frieze Art Fair

Any artist who has enough gypsy-pirate-outlaw to make her art in homemade boats along the waterways around New York and abandoned islands and inlets is great in my book. Thanks to Cecilia Alemani, the outstanding curator of the High Line, Frieze New York visitors — like me — were allowed passage into Lorenz's beautiful seafaring world.

13. Jen Catron and Paul Outlaw's One Stop Shopping Souvenir City and Chelsea Bus Tour

Speaking of gypsy-outlaws, intrepid performance artists Jen Catron, an art-world version of Beauty (she and her

blazing-red hair and smashing smile), and Paul Outlaw, Beast (this burly, barrel-chested, bearded guy in sunglasses), set up a tricked-out truck outside a Gagosian Chelsea outlet, selling arty knockoffs and giving guided tours to all comers.

14. Katherine Bernhardt, Stupid, Crazy, Ridiculous, Funny Patterns, Canada

If one youngish gallery has emerged as indispensable insofar as painting goes — and there are many in contention for this title — Canada is it. One of its most indispensable (if out-there), wild-style painters is Katherine Bernhardt, who can always be depended on to push her gashing brushwork, gushing color, and gaudy, all-over composition to ever feral and smart heights.

15. Sarah Michelson, Whitney Museum

I owe one critic my allegiance to this amazing movement maker/choreographer: ArtForum's David Velasaco, who has sung Sarah Michelson's song from the start. At the Whitney, I sat slack-jawed as a troupe of dancers merged sex, violence, repetition, physicality, duration, and inspiration into prima-ballerina from-the-future shapes and forms.

16. Jennifer Wynne Reeves, BravinLee

My Huckleberry friend, the late painter Jennifer Wynne Reeves, and her thick, rich, small-scale, kaleidoscopic paintings lit up my eyes and touched my heart. Good-bye, self-burning, driven ship.

17. Andrew Ohanesian, Pierogi

One of the best outdoor pieces I saw all season was outside this great DIY Brooklyn outpost. Artist Andrew Ohanesian's full-scale fake scaffolding erected outside the gallery seemed to signify yet another undistinguished, giant, boring building about to be plopped down in Williamsburg, displacing ever more artists and low-income residents.

18. Dawn Kasper, "& sun & or THE SHAPE OF TIME," David Lewis Gallery

It's not often that art scares me, but on seeing Dawn Kasper performing in her show, I knew I was in the presence of a shaman with great powers, someone able to tap into something deep, maybe dark, and to be watched carefully. From a safe distance.

19. Oscar Tuazon and Eli Hansen, Maccarone

Oscar Tuazon's hulky hybrids between sculpture, architecture, furniture, and stout, otherworldly beings amaze while evoking walls, figures, windows, and hitching posts. Working with his younger brother Eli, the two created an environment of specific objects that were haunted and impressive, including a working toilet perched on a steel armature over a water-filled shallow basin that, when flushed, not only acts like a fountain but references Duchamp's famous urinal, titled Fountain. This one was called Huh.

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