

Here Are The 15 Best Art Exhibitions Of 2014

The Huffington Post | By [Priscilla Frank](#)

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As the year draws to a close, we're looking back at the exhibitions that made our jaws drop, our heads spin and our eyes eternally grateful. Behold, in no particular order, the 15 best exhibitions of 2014.

1. Kara Walker's "A Subtlety" at the Domino Sugar Factory



Walker transformed Brooklyn's 30,000-square-foot former Domino Sugar facility, slated for demolition, into the most arresting art installation of the year. If you didn't pay tribute to the 35-foot sugar sphinx in person, and witness the Mammie-esque mythical creature in all her monumental glory, you surely saw her image sprinkled across your social media channels, making historical questions of objectification and exploitation as relevant as ever.

"The process of refining sugar really only serves one purpose and that is to turn sugar from brown to white (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/katherine-brooks/kara-walker-domino_b_5492969.html)," Walker explained in an interview with The Huffington Post. "In earlier centuries, people saw sugar as emblematic of this kind of capitalist, democratic impulse, where anybody could potentially come up through the ranks and refine themselves. They'd become pure and desirable -- it's a way of being in the world." Learn more about the striking installation -- and the [many myths associated with it](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/katherine-brooks/kara-walker-domino_b_5492969.html) (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/katherine-brooks/kara-walker-domino_b_5492969.html) -- [here](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/katherine-brooks/kara-walker-domino_b_5492969.html) (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/katherine-brooks/kara-walker-domino_b_5492969.html).

2. "State of the Art" at Crystal Bridges

9. Dorothy Iannone's Retrospective at Berlinische Galerie



Dorothy Iannone, Let the Light from My Lighthouse Shine on You, 1981, Privatsammlung Schweiz, © Dorothy Iannone, Foto: Jochen Littkemann, Courtesy Air de Paris, Paris

For fifty years Iannone has been crafting the sexiest Buddhist-inspired imagery there ever was. She's been hailed as a "[high priestess, matriarch, sex goddess](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/04/dorothy-iannone_n_5440339.html) (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/04/dorothy-iannone_n_5440339.html)," and for good reason. Her vivid geometric canvases depicting cartoonish genitalia, bodies without beginning or end and a healthy dose of body hair capture the sublime potential of sex like no other.



"White Naptha Soap" by Vanessa German, Contemporary Lenswork in Shagbottle, 2013, mixed media, assemblage. Courtesy of Forest D'Arbuthnot Gallery, New York

One hundred works, no big names and an insane road trip -- this is the idea behind Crystal Bridges' massive, and massively democratic exhibition. Positioning itself as the "anti-Whitney Biennial," the exhibition spotlighted American artists from all corners of the country, many of whom had never before shown their work in a museum. The show, offering everything from "power dolls" made of trash (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/06/crystal-bridges-vanessa-german_n_5936778.html) to a "Mom Booth." (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/06/crystal-bridges-andy-duckett_n_5927060.html) presents a diverse and exhilarating slice of contemporary art that expands far beyond New York and LA. It's a beautiful thing (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/02/crystal-bridges_n_5923320.html).

3. Ai Weiwei's '@Large' at Alcatraz



Activist and artist Ai Weiwei, who himself was detained by Chinese authorities in 2011, converted Alcatraz, the notorious San Francisco prison complex turned tourist attraction, into an artistic meditation on freedom and captivity. The "With Wind" installation which greeted viewers, featured above, takes the shape of a Chinese dragon adorned with flowers from countries who restrict their citizens' civil liberties as well as quotes from notorious dissidents. Another installation, "Trace," features 176 portraits of individuals imprisoned or exiled based on their beliefs, from Gedhun Choekyi Nyima to Edward Snowden. The multimedia exhibition raises questions such as "Can the mind be liberated when the body is not?" (<http://www.motherjones.com/media/2014/10/ai-weiwei-alcatraz-art-large/>)

4. "Cameron: Songs for the Witch Woman" at MOCA



Cameron, Holy Guardian Angel according to Aleister Crowley, 1966. Casein and gold tempera on board, 29 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches. Courtesy of the Cameron Parsons Foundation, Santa Monica. Photo Credit: Alan Shaffer

Between her birth in 1923 to her death in 1995, Cameron was a witch, an actress, a muse, a countercultural icon and an artist in her own rite. Almost 100 of her artworks went on view at MOCA (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/08/marjorie-cameron-moca_n_5656561.html) this year, from drug-induced sketches to bewitching paintings and love poems.

"Her hallucinated vision, at the edge of surrealism and psychedelia embodies an aspect of modernity that deeply doubts and defies cartesian logic at a moment in history when these values have shown their own limitations (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/08/marjorie-cameron-moca_n_5656561.html)," explained MOCA Director Philippe Vergne. "Her work demonstrates that the space in the mind is without limit."

5. "Unbound: Contemporary Art After Frida Kahlo at MCA Chicago



Frida Kahlo, La caza (The Hunt), 1945. Private collection, Chicago. © 2013 Banco de México. Diego Rivera-Frida Kahlo Museum Trust, Mexico, D.F. / Artista Rights Society (ARS), New York.

What's the only thing better than an exhibition dedicated to Frida Kahlo? How about an exhibition dedicated to the almighty artist and her subsequent influence on contemporary art through artists like Louise Bourgeois, Shirin Neshat, Sanford Biggers and Catherine Opie. "What would this world look like without Frida Kahlo (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/29/unbound-contemporary-art_n_5229106.html)? It's impossible to say. But it's just as impossible not to think of Kahlo's impact when contemplating today's most rebellious artistic spirits, experimenting with the boundaries of sexuality, race, politics, taste, art and life."

6. "Grandes Maestros: Great Masters of Iberoamerican Folk Art" at the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles



Oliver Botwin. Photo: Artistic Team of Rembrandt, 2014

This feast for the eyes features 800 folk art masters hailing from Latin America, Spain and Portugal. The dazzling objects on view range from masks to sculptures to dresses to ceramics, some of which were made within the last ten years. "Some are artists who are famous in their countries whose objects cost thousands and thousands of dollars (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/17/latin-american-folk-art-n_5986596.html)," Dr. Karen Wise, Vice President of Exhibits and Education, explained to The Huffington Post, "and others are members of small, indigenous communities who have been laboring making traditional objects and are highlighted in this exhibit."

7. "Report on the Construction of a Spaceship Module" at New Museum

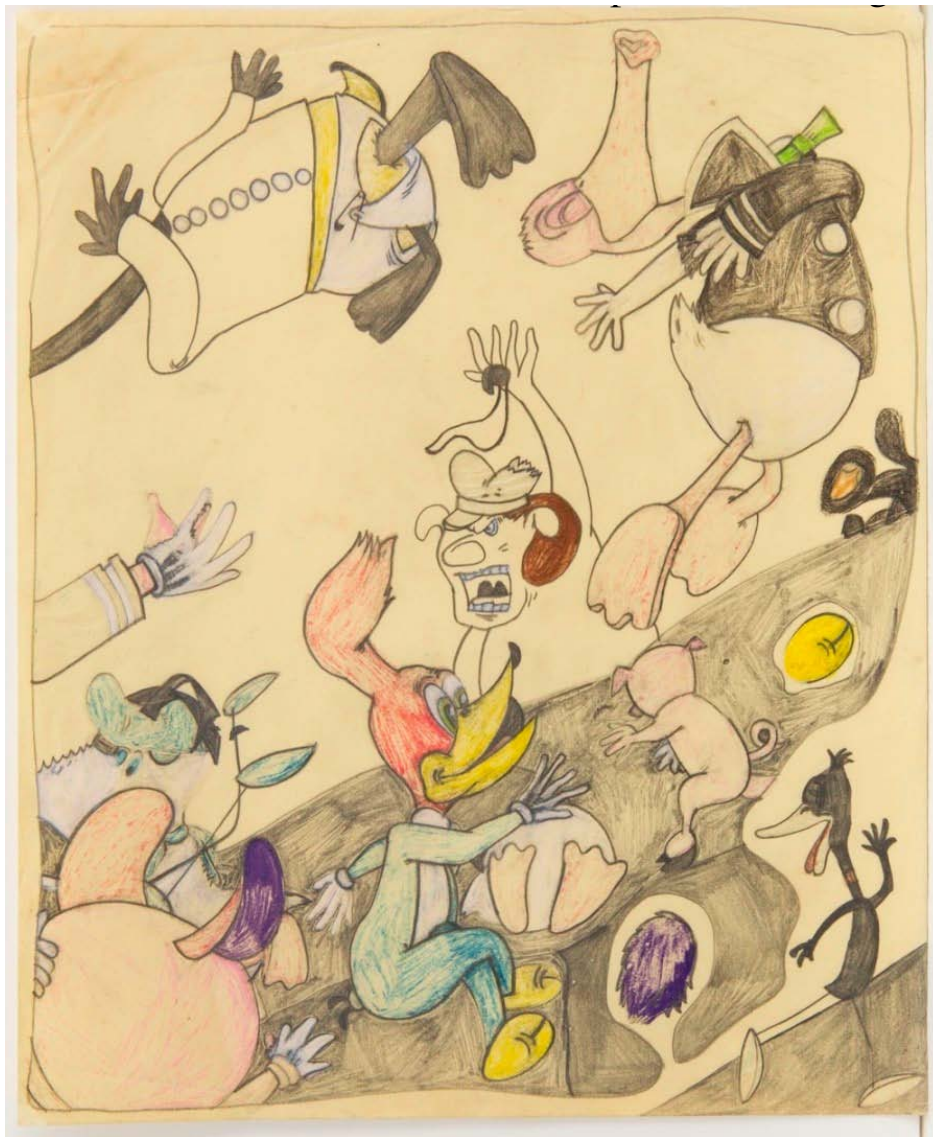


Jindřich Polák, Ikarie XB-4 (Voyage to the End of the Universe), 1963 (still), Courtesy the National Film Archive, Prague

In one of the more unusual exhibitions of the year, the New Museum transformed its entire fifth floor into the interior of a spaceship, specifically "Ikarie" from the 1963 Czech film "Ikarie XB-1." Inside were works by artists hailing from Vienna, Prague, Budapest, Bucharest, and Bratislava, illuminating the difficult task curators face when collapsing time and space to organize an exhibition.

"The unique model evokes the challenges that contemporary artists experience in exhibiting works (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/23/museum-spaceship-n_4647415.html)," the New Museum explained, "or that curators come across in organizing exhibitions that stitch together diverse artworks, selected across generation, cultural context, personal narratives, and time."

8. Susan Te Kahurangi King's "Drawings from Many Worlds" at Andrew Edlin Gallery



Susan Te Kahurangi King Untitled, c. 1965 Graphite and colored pencil on paper 11 x 9 inches (27.9 x 22.9 cm)

King, born in 1951, stopped speaking completely between the ages of four and six. Since then, the artist communicates solely through her artworks -- fantastical, whirling drawings of pen, graphite, colored pencil, crayon, and ink, conjuring alternate universes waiting just beyond your Saturday Morning Cartoons. "[She's very visually aware \(http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/07/susan-te-kahurangi-king-n_6097468.html\)](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/07/susan-te-kahurangi-king-n_6097468.html)," curator Chris Byrne explained to The Huffington Post. "Her sisters said even when she'd hold an animal, she'd get a sense of the anatomy of it. She's a great artist; she gets it. She gets what it means to be alive."



Alice Mackler, untitled, 2014, glazed ceramic

This show, a riff on Marcia Tucker and Marcia Tanner's 1994 exhibition "Bad Girls," features seven feminist artists proud to flaunt a good sense of humor and some bad taste. The show features work from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/17/daughter-of-bad-girls_n_5301553.html some of our personal heroines including octogenarian art darling Alice Mackler, anonymous collective Guerrilla Girls and transgender performer and painter Viginal Davis. If you needed convincing, feminists have fun too.

11. "Sacred Symbols in Sequins: Vintage Haitian Vodou Flags" at the Everhart Museum



Erzule Froides Duvannin (Rada) Mid 20th century Plastic, satin, silk, sequins, beads, burlap, thread, fringe, and ribbon

This hypnotic exhibition featured the glittering flags used to induce religious experiences, synthesizing elements of European, American and African histories into a single, colorful vision. "They shimmer, glisten and become the meditative focal point of the Vodou ritual before the possession takes place (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/01/vodou-flag_n_5099160.html)." Everhart Museum curator Neeka Pfeiffer explained to The Huffington Post. "They are made with religious power."

12. Swoon's "Submerged Motherlands" at the Brooklyn Museum



<http://images.huffingtonpost.com/2014-04-09-brooklynstreetartswoonjaimeirojbrooklynmuseum0.0914web201.jpg>

"Swoon: Submerged Motherlands" Detail of the top of the tree. (photo © Jaime Rojas)

Brooklyn-based artist Swoon transformed the rotunda of the Brooklyn Museum into an otherworldly swamp, erecting a giant sculptural tree in the space's center, surrounded by boats, rafts, and paper portraits. The immersive installation, in part a response to 2012's Hurricane Sandy, illuminates the precious nature of our environment and the potential power of the human being.

"We worked it all out in the studio and then we just spent weeks tearing and shredding and dyeing the fabric (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jaime-rojo-steven-harrington/swoon-brooklyn-museum_b_5115253.html), cutting out paper leaves, and building up these kind of 'roots,' crocheting pieces, putting dyed fabric on them, sewing sleeves for the rings to put dyed fabric on -- it's just been immense!" Swoon explained to Brooklyn Street Art. "It's one of those things where I've never built something on this scale so I really don't realize how much energy it absorbs when it is that size."

13. Jeff Koons' Retrospective at Whitney Museum



Thanks to Mr. Koons, 2014 was the year of the shiny balloon dog -- and the Play-Doh pile, and the artsy pool toy. Yes, Koons' Whitney takeover was as enchanting as it was maddening, and whether we loved it or reviled it, we couldn't look away. ["We can hate him or worship him, it doesn't matter" \(http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/27/jeff-koons-a-retrospective_n_5538103.html\)](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/27/jeff-koons-a-retrospective_n_5538103.html). He'll keep on producing mammoth 'masterpieces' that bottle up everything that's wrong with lust and consumerism into something that buyers and admirers lust after and consume."

14. "When the Stars Begin to Fall: Imagination and the American South" at the Studio Museum in Harlem



Henry Ray Clark On Our Planet Name Yahoo We Are Called Doctory Childs We Sing and Dance to We do Know One Thing For Sure We Will Never Separate Are Be Apart, 2003 Ink and marker on manilla envelope 13 1/2 x 20 1/2 in. Courtesy Jack Messing

This stunning group exhibition gathered self-taught artists from the 1960s to the present (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/27/when-the-stars-begin-to-fall_n_4861874.html) who, in some way, engaged with the stereotypes associated with blackness -- whether by utilizing them or challenging them. The artists also united in their obsession, in one way or another, with the American South, both as it exists in reality and in the imagination. The show combines the work of outsider artists and established names like Carrie Mae Weems and Kerry James Marshall, exploring and questioning the meaning of "black art."

15. Emma Sulkowicz's "Carry That Weight" at Columbia University



One of the most critical art happenings of the year didn't take place at a gallery or a museum. Sulkowicz was a sophomore art student at Columbia University when she was raped by a classmate in her dorm room, and her alleged attacker was found not responsible by the university. For her senior thesis, Sulkowicz resolved to carry her mattress everywhere she went on campus until her rapist was expelled left.

"The past year or so of my life has been really marked by telling people what happened in that most intimate private space and bringing it out into the light. (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/03/emma-sulkowicz-mattress-rape-columbia-university_n_5755612.html)" Sulkowicz explained in a video. "So I think the act of carrying something that is normally found in our bedroom out into the light is supposed to mirror the way I've talked to the media and talked to different news channels."

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