

The Most Influential Living Artists of 2016

Artsy Editorial

There would be no art world without artists. It's nearly impossible to whittle down the many thousands if not millions around the world who have dedicated their lives in some way to an art practice; even in the art world, influence is ever more global and diffuse. But through combining the insight of Artsy's editors with data from UBS's art news app [Planet Art](#) and other sources, some trends do emerge for 2016. The artists who most captured the public's—and the media's—attention were primarily dealing with key issues of our time: political persecution, racism, sexism, and climate change. And they were privileging and engaging vast audiences with content, not flash. If this is any indication of the direction that the art world itself is headed in, then art is poised to be more relevant and powerful than ever. Below, in no particular order, are the most influential living artists of 2016.

[Philippe Parreno](#) [⊕ Follow](#)

B. 1964, ORAN, ALGERIA • LIVES AND WORKS IN PARIS



Philippe Parreno, October 22, 2008, New York, New York. Portrait by Jason Schmidt.

The art world arrived in droves when London's [Tate Modern](#) unveiled Parreno's "Anywhen" in its famed Turbine Hall at the start of Frieze Week this October. The 52-year-old French artist has a multifaceted practice, spanning sculpture, performance, installation, and film. Threaded throughout is an interest in producing impermanent, multifarious environments that fluidly change (in this case evolve) over time based on a provided logic. "Philippe Parreno is rigorous, experimental, free, collaborative, generous, political," says Andrea Lissoni, senior curator of film and international art at Tate Modern. "His work appears and disappears. Not here nor there, not sooner or later. It's happening anywhen," he adds, nodding to the Turbine Hall installation's title.

With "Anywhen," audiences moved through the space enveloped in a web of sound, film, light—and mylar balloons shaped like fish. All aspects of the installation, except for the fish balloons, were directed not by the artist but instead by an algorithm, programmed to respond to the growth of bacteria Parreno had placed in a bioreactor located in an office above the hall. The fish floated at random, meant merely to direct viewers' gazes and bodies throughout the space. Parreno mounted another bacteria-driven installation across two Gladstone Gallery spaces in New York this spring; it consumed the entryway to the [Brooklyn Museum](#) this fall.

Parreno is one of a tight-knit group of artists who in the '90s became associated with "[relational aesthetics](#)," an approach to artmaking that emphasizes the evolving experience of a work more so than any physical artwork itself. His best-known pieces range from pulsating marquees of light bulbs, which graced [Palais de Tokyo](#) in 2013 and the [Park Avenue Armory](#) in 2015; to the 2006 feature-length film he created with [Douglas Gordon](#) following French footballer Zinedine Zidane through the entirety of a single match; to cartoons, animations, and performances of Ann Lee, the manga character he purchased rights to in 1999 with frequent collaborator [Pierre Huyghe](#). This purposefully broad spectrum leaves many hard-pressed to categorize Parreno's work. At the time of the artist's hypnotic [show at the Park Avenue Armory in 2015](#), curator Tom Eccles said, "The wonderful world of Philippe Parreno is made up of many different parts. There isn't a signature style."