

## The 50 Most Exciting Artists of 2014

Christian Viveros-Fauné, Monday, December 29, 2014



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Life can't be boiled down to a listicle. Neither can art or money. Yet all three have become so intimately intertwined that they could seriously stand the kind of rearranging that only an alternative inventory can provide. Some readers will invariably quote *The Guardian's* snarky 5 Ways the Listicle Is Changing Journalism to complain about the lite-beer nature of the form. But I ask you: Didn't Wallace Steven's use a list to structure his poem "13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird"? And didn't Moses himself bring down the mother of all listicles from Mount Sinai etched into stone tablets? Per BuzzFeed's own accounting, the Internet is obviously several thousand years behind an Old Testament trend.

Put in new media lingo, the following are three good reasons to generate a list featuring 50 of the most important artists of 2014 who are also likely to be historically well remembered. Firstly, lists like these can help soothe the sense of helplessness many folks feel about visual art's current transformation into a plaything for the megarich. Secondly, similar lineups organize ideas about the role critically minded art can play in a rapidly changing art ecology. And thirdly, the exercise—together with other end of the

year wrap-ups—helps reestablish a sturdy counter-agenda to those put forward by auction houses, art fairs, and art market skills.

As Ben Genocchio put it recently in [a piece for artnet News](#), “short-term market values actually have little bearing on long-term value.” This is mainly because art ultimately answers to historical evaluations far bigger than today's Fortune 500 list. So screw the style section snapshot of the art market and its myopic listicle fodder. Let's take the long view. Here goes, then: This is this my first (very) contrary list of the top 50 most exciting, important (and enduring) artists who were active in 2014, with no apologies and in no particular order.

- 1) **Rick Lowe:** The artist's 2014 MacArthur Fellowship was awarded for his founding and ongoing stewardship of Houston's Project Row Houses—the *Demoiselles D'Avignon* of social practice.
- 2) **Neo Rauch:** His November outing at David Zwirner was a knockout that mixed together history painting and personal meditations on sickness, recovery, and health.
- 3) **Thomas Hirschhorn:** The artist's 2013 *Gramsci Monument* at the Bronx's Forest Houses dominated conversations about art and activism during 2014.
- 4) **Pussy Riot:** Released from Putin's penal colony in 2013, members of the Russian punk rock group barnstormed the globe giving lectures (including at MoMA PS1 in November for the show “Zero Tolerance”), performed tirelessly, and won the 2014 Hannah Arendt Prize for Political Thought.
- 5) **Chris Verene:** In his December show at Postmasters, the photographer translated his poignant portraits of poor white America into literal and figurative moving images.
- 6) **Harun Farocki:** *Videograms of a Revolution*, a video about the fall of the Ceausescu regime, displayed at MoMA PS1's exhibition “Zero Tolerance,” underscored the importance of this prolific filmmaker after his passing in July.
- 7) **Tavares Strachan:** The Bahamian artist's inspiring 100-foot pink neon sign *You Belong Here* (2014) lit up the Mississippi river as well as 2014's ambitious Prospect.3 biennial.
- 8) **Wu Tsang:** On the heels of his 2012 Whitney Biennial portrait of immigrant transsexuals, the LA-based artist and performer presented a two-channel video at the Hammer Museum's biennial exhibition “Made in LA.”
- 9) **Chris Ofili:** In a long overdue New Museum retrospective, the Briton amply demonstrated that decorative painting can, indeed, sport a cutting edge.
- 10) **Gabriel Orozco:** The Mexican artist's fall show at Marian Goodman saw him squeeze profound metaphors and insights from mundane objects and materials.
- 11) **Lisa Yuskavage:** Several international group shows anticipated the post-feminist painter's upcoming major survey at the Rose Art Museum, as well as her 2015 solo show at David Zwirner.

- 12) Eva and Franco Mattes:** An investigation of the underside of today's rampant technophilia, their show at Postmasters "By Everyone, For No One, Everyday," and exploration of the "darkweb," was among the best shows of the year in New York.
- 13) Voïna:** The absurdist collective have expressed support for Russia's annexation of Crimea and pulled out of the Dutch OpenBorder Festival, outlining the dangerously fanatical outer edges of the art-as-politics realm.
- 14) Theaster Gates:** Known for his juggernaut urban reclamation project, Gates was awarded a \$1.3 million contract by the Chicago Transit Authority to create the city's largest public artwork project in its history; and \$50,000 of that will go toward activities for community engagement.
- 15) Andrea Fraser:** Fraser's mesmerizing performance at the New Orleans Museum of Art during Project.3 ventriloquized the state of American race relations, as experienced inside one New Orleans city council meeting.
- 16) LaToya Ruby Frazier:** After a blistering 2013 solo show at the Brooklyn Museum, the Braddock, Pennsylvania-born artist published *The Notion of Family* (Aperture), an intimate portrait of how her kin have internalized experiences of poverty, intolerance, and racism.
- 17) Glenn Kaino:** The LA-based artist took on two public commissions this year (one in Washington D.C., and the other at Prospect.3) and put together *Leviathan*, a sprawling protest-minded installation at the warehouse space of Chicago dealer Kavi Gupta.
- 18) Tania Bruguera:** After establishing the Queens, NY-based Immigrant Movement International, the Cuban artist has continued exhibiting widely (in the Guggenheim summer exhibition "Under the Same Sun: Art from Latin America Today," for one) while expanding her global idea of *arte útil*, or useful art.
- 19) Sarah Sze:** The Walt Whitman of mundane materials, Sze reinstalled a complex sculpture, originally created for the U.S. Pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennale, at The Bronx Museum.
- 20) John Currin:** In a sold-out talk at LA's Getty Center, Currin expounded, mostly convincingly, on the aesthetic radicalism of painting as a perverse act.
- 21) Ai Weiwei:** Unable to leave China since 2011, the artist continues to spread the gospel of protest art through exhibitions like "@Large," on Alcatraz Island, CA and "According to What?," at the Brooklyn Museum.
- 22) Richard Mosse:** The Irish artist's photography and film portraying the human tragedy experienced in the Democratic Republic of Congo drew raves at the 2013 Venice Biennale, and was awarded the 2014 Deutsche Börse prize.
- 23) Superflex:** A 2014 retrospective at Mexico City's Jumex Collection explored the Danish artist group's experiments with art, society, and ecology, as well as their challenges to private and intellectual property.

- 24) Kara Walker:** Her massive sugar sculpture at the Domino Sugar Factory in Williamsburg drew viewers in with the promise of something sweet, while delivering corrosive thoughts on race relations, slavery, and the effects of gentrification.
- 25) David Hammons:** The artist's first major London gallery show (at White Cube) will certainly help the artist open his own planned art space in Yonkers, New York.
- 26) Glenn Ligon:** Ligon's work, which continues to deconstruct racial and sexual politics, was everywhere in 2014, as seen in his appearances at Prospect.3 and the UK's Camden Arts Centre, among other venues.
- 27) Allora & Calzadilla:** An excellent 2014 exhibition at Chelsea's Gladstone Gallery was followed up by an even better two-institution outing in Philly that explored art, music, and intellectual history at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and The Fabric Workshop and Museum.
- 28) Tom Friedman:** The artist's Luhring Augustine Bushwick show transformed plain Styrofoam and acrylic paint into sculptures worthy of the Greek sculptor Praxiteles.
- 29) The Bruce High Quality Foundation:** The Bruces continues to provide a platform for the free exchange of ideas among artists via their eponymous university—BHQFU—because, as the art collective proclaims on their website, “an art world built solely to feed the industry isn't an interesting place to live.”
- 30) Dawoud Bey:** The Chicago native's photo-portrait series “The Birmingham Project” was featured at the 2014 Whitney Biennial and in a full-dress solo exhibition at Mary Boone's 57th Street space.
- 31) Teresa Margolles:** A small work by the forensic physician and artist was a highlight of the Jumex Foundation's inaugural show; her solo exhibition at Zurich's Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst over the summer occupied a bigger stage.
- 32) William Powhida:** The artist's second show at Postmasters, titled “Overculture”—of paintings, drawings, sculpture, lists, and charts—provided the perfect portmanteau for our own Gilded Age, Part II.
- 33) Lucia Koch:** The Brazilian artist's Prospect.3 interventions with tinted Plexiglass proved to be some of the most radical “painting without paint” to be seen anywhere.
- 34) Justine Kurland:** In her first New York show in five years, “Sincere Auto Care” at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, the wayward shutterbug found transport and grace inside the garages of blue-collar America.
- 35) Pablo Helguera:** The artist was righteously featured in multiple shows of socially engaged art—among them “A Proximity of Consciousness” at Chicago's School of the Art Institute and “Crossing Brooklyn” at the Brooklyn Museum.
- 36) Cindy Sherman:** Actor James Franco's rip-off of the photographer's series Untitled Film Stills (1977-80) are one more sign that Sherman's influence is not widespread, it's ubiquitous.

**37) Philip-Lorca diCorcia:** The photographer's theatrically lit takes on gritty realism were exhibited at, among other venues, Sprüth Magers, Berlin.

**38) Pierre Huyghe:** The Frenchman's opaque yet foxy conceptualism received the big survey treatment at LACMA.

**39) Omer Fast:** Shortlisted for the 2015 Artes Mundi Prize, the Israeli-born video artist began shooting his first feature, "Remainder"; it stars Tom Sturridge of *Effie Gray* fame.

**40) Olafur Eliasson:** Channeling the current mania over the painter J.M.W. Turner, the prolific Icelandic artist made *Turner Colour Experiments*, a series of seven circular canvases produced in response to Turner's paintings, and exhibited at Tate Britain.

**41) Cai Guo-Quiang:** The influential Chinese artist had major shows at, among other venues, the Aspen Art Museum, The Power Station of Art, Shanghai, and the Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.

**42) Hito Steyerl:** The muse of Post-Internet art got her own solo museum show at the ICA London

**43) Rafael Ferrer:** An important inclusion in the Guggenheim's "Under the Same Sun" exhibition (mentioned above), Ferrer also provided a red, white, and blue neon coda to this year's Art Basel in Miami Beach zombieland with a seminal work titled *Artforum*.

**44) Bouchra Khalili:** A winner of the 2014 Abraaj Group Art Prize, the Casablanca-born artist was also featured in the New Museum's exhibition "Here and Elsewhere."

**45) Hiwa K:** Exhibited at the New Museum, the artist's videotaped hijacking of a violent political demonstration in his native Iraq was one of the best works exhibited anywhere in 2014.

**46) Jordan Wolfson:** Wolfson's single animatronic go-go dancer at David Zwirner proved more disturbing than Paul McCarthy's entire oeuvre.

**47) Santiago Cirugeda:** This artist has turned abandoned sites in Seville and Madrid into functioning art spaces with low-cost, high-impact projects.

**48) Pawel Althamer:** The Polish conceptualist's New Museum survey included his haunting sculptures, a drawing workshop taught by the artist, and "Draftsmen's Congress," a single collective art work made by Althamer with the help of museum visitors.

**49) Mel Chin:** The pioneering socially engaged conceptualist landed a four-decade survey at the New Orleans Museum of Art.

**50) Hans Haacke:** In his first New York gallery show in five years, at Paula Cooper's 21st Street space, the 78-year-old artist and activist took on David H. Koch, the Metropolitan Museum, and today's pay-to-play trustee scheme with his work *The Business Behind Art Knows the Art of Good Business—Your Company and the Metropolitan Museum of Art*.