

# The New York Times

## Best Art of 2024

This was a year whose high points included Joan Jonas's luminous survey, the extravaganza "PST ART," and the 24-karat beauty of a show "Siena: The Rise of Painting, 1300-1350."



Joan Jonas in her studio with her dog Sappho, New York, 1972. Dogs have been featured prominently in her work.  
Credit...Babette Mangolte, via The Museum of Modern Art New York



By Holland Cotter

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Art-wise, 2024 had an in-between-things vibe. It was a year of big-deal biennials, but the consensus was that none delivered much firepower. There was a lot of talk about money — what sold for what, and to whom — but no radically record-busting news. In general, the institutional art world veered, as it always does, between uplift (some strong museum shows) and cringe (the \$6.2 million banana). I'll go mostly with uplift in the (unranked) list of highlights below.

## Joan Jonas

How to be long-term luminous was the lesson taught by “Joan Jonas: Good Night Good Morning” at the Museum of Modern Art, a six-decade survey of the still intensely active career of one of our most inventive contemporary artists. Over the years, Jonas, now 88, has broken experimental ground in video, photography, performance, conceptual art and installation, giving everything she touches the warmth of a watchfully lived life. It's evident from gallery to gallery at MoMA, and in a concurrent show of works on paper, “Joan Jonas: Animal, Vegetable, Mineral,” at the Drawing Center in SoHo. (*Read our review of “Joan Jonas: Good Night Good Morning.”*)

## Two Hit Shows From the Met



A silver gilt crucifix by Tondino di Guerrino draws viewers in the show “Siena: The Rise of Painting: 1300-1350.”  
Credit... George Etheredge for The New York Times



William Henry Johnson, “Street Life, Harlem,” circa 1939-1940, from “The Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism.” In Johnson’s buoyant painting a dapper Harlem couple steps out for a stroll beneath a tangerine slice of a moon.  
Credit...Karsten Moran for The New York Times

The Metropolitan Museum of Art had a good year. Its current show “Siena: The Rise of Painting, 1300-1350” is a 24-karat display of some of the dreamiest early Italian Renaissance painting on earth, all from a stylistic universe that held a medieval vision of heaven as an ocean of gold close to its heart (through Jan. 26). In “The Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism,” the

museum had another hit. The show settled historical scores by giving full and careful attention to art the Met had once ignored. And in a broad-stroke way, it prepared the ground for other, incisive views of Black Modernism to come. (*Read our reviews of “Siena: The Rise of Painting” and “The Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism.”*)

### **‘PST ART: Art and Science Collide’**

For the third edition of the multi-venue art extravaganza once called “Pacific Standard Time,” now “PST ART,” the Getty Foundation, its funder and organizer, asked some 70 Southern California cultural institutions to cook up exhibitions on the theme of “Science and Art Collide.” It was a baggy assignment but some results rose to the occasion. The Getty’s own exhibition, “Lumen: The Art and Science of Light,” did through pure breath-catching visual scintillation. So did a small survey, assembled by LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions), devoted to the conceptual artist Beatriz da Costa, who, in her short life — she died of cancer at 38 — called on the energies of plants and birds in projects aimed at planetary healing (through Jan. 5). (*Read our critic’s notebook about “PST ART.”*)

### **A Museum Closes**



Visitors communed around the spiral staircase at the Rubin Museum of Art on its final day. Credit...Sinna Nasserri for The New York Times

On Oct. 6, the Rubin Museum of Art, in Manhattan’s Chelsea neighborhood, shut its doors for the last time, bringing to an end a two-decade run as the city’s go-to home for art from the Himalayas, with a spotlight on Tibet. In the lead-up announcements, the Rubin asserted that it would continue to exist as a “museum without walls” by lending its collection and creating traveling shows. But longtime devotees knew that the pixilated thing it had been — a former Barney’s clothing store retrofitted as an Airbnb for bodhisattvas; a place where life-addled New Yorkers could stagger in, power down and bliss out — was gone for good. (*Read our critic’s notebook on the museum.*)



## Memory: People

In 2024, as in every year, there was a different kind of loss, of art world figures. Some — Faith Ringgold, Richard Serra, Frank Stella — were acknowledged monuments. Certain others had a more modestly scaled but invaluable presence, including the much-loved Vietnamese conceptualist Dinh Q. Le; the visionary land artist Patricia Johanson; the high-winged visual poet Anton van Dalen; the photographer and En Foco co-founder Charles Biasiny-Rivera; the adamantly hands-on Minimalist sculptor Jackie Winsor; the prescient Korean American installation artist Yong Soon Min; the Blakean fantasist June Leaf; and the art critic and inveterate cringe-spotter, Gary Indiana. (*Read our appraisals of Faith Ringgold, Richard Serra and Frank Stella.*)

## Raven Chacon

In a Whitney Biennial four years ago, Raven Chacon, a Pulitzer-winning Navajo composer and artist, made a haunting impression with a sound piece called “Silent Choir (Standing Rock),” an aural recording of a voiceless Native American protest. A 2024 survey of his work, “A Worm’s Eye View From a Bird’s Beak,” at Swiss Institute in Manhattan encompassing videos, a pictographic mural and compositions scored for wind, voice and gunshots expanded our sense of his range. Like the work of John Cage and Yoko Ono, who influenced him, his is art for ear, eye and mind. (*Read our review of the show.*)

## Lyle Ashton Harris



Lyle Ashton Harris's "Succession," 2020, two dye sublimation prints on Ghanaian fabric and the artist's ephemera. The bewigged Harris is here, as is one image of him as a toddler, sitting on the lap of his father, Thomas Allen Harris Sr. Credit...via Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University

As the artist Lyle Ashton Harris explains it, he found the title for his midcareer survey printed on a slip of paper in a fortune cookie. It read: “Our first and last love is Self-Love.” His excellent

traveling show “Lyle Ashton Harris: Our First and Last Love,” seen at the Queens Museum, was, indeed, autobiographical, the story of a queer, Black, Bronx-born man who spent some years living in Africa but retains close family ties to New York, and whose art stays tuned into the intricate workings of race and gender and love wherever it lands. *(Read our review of “Lyle Ashton Harris: Our First and Last Love.”)*

## ‘El Dorado’

Installed in Americas Society’s small Manhattan gallery, the second half of the ambitious two-part exhibition called “El Dorado: Myths of Gold” opened last January. As compelling to look at as it was to think about, it considered gold both as a substance of spiritual allure to Indigenous peoples of the ancient Americas, as an early magnet of European colonial acquisition, and as a spur to an empire-building still very much with us. With art including cast-gold pre-Hispanic sculptures, gilded church altarpieces and critically reflective work by contemporary artists, the show confirms the valuable scholarly work being done by small institutions outside the mainstream.

## Serious Joy



The Brooklyn Museum’s reinstated American Art collection includes, from left, Joseph Stella, “The Virgin”; Emma Amos, “Flower Sniffer”; Kenzo Okada, “Flower Study”; Lois Mailou Jones, textile design, 1928, reproduced on wallpaper by Flavor Paper. Credit... George Etheredge for The New York Times

The Brooklyn Museum hit 200 this year and celebrated with “Toward Joy: New Frameworks for American Art,” a rethink of its famed American galleries. An introductory text defined the guiding curatorial principle: “As an art museum, we are a site for celebrating beauty. But what does one do when beautiful artworks are entangled in ugly and often violent histories?” The answer? Name those histories (colonialism, enslavement and environmental degradation are some addressed here), draw on new perspectives (Black feminist in this case) to think about them, and, always, take the beauty of the art in question seriously, which this buzzing collection rehang does. *(Read our critic’s notebook on the Brooklyn Museum’s bicentennial.)*

## New Old

It's long been fashionable to disparage MoMA's contemporary collecting habits as behind-the-beat. But input from a younger, globally minded generation of curators is having its way these days. And in visits over the past year to the museum's second-floor permanent contemporary galleries, where works come and go in rotation, I often felt a punch of surprise. I did a while back when I encountered, set in a space with incense-rubbed walls, the sublimely grave shrine of an installation called "House of Hope" by the Thai artist Montien Boonma (1953-2000). And I did again recently at the sight of the newly installed and soaring "Bird That Flies Over America" by the Cuban artist Juan Francisco Elso (1956-88). And, again, with a small, material-dense reliquary of a sculpture titled "Tears" by the Cherokee artist Kay WalkingStick. And, again, with the multitiered curiosity-cabinet of an assemblage, dated 2022, called "Shrine (White)." A kind of miniature museum within MoMA, lovingly created by the New York artist Agosto Machado, "Shrine (White)" is dedicated to the titanic gay liberationist Marsha P. Johnson. And, boy, do we, and a cash-choked art world, need liberationists now.