



Naughtie Behavior | The Year in Art

CULTURE | By LINDA YABLONSKY | DECEMBER 30, 2009, 3:28 PM

“Performance art emerged as a significant force for ideas,” reported T’s roving critic, Linda Yablonsky, who pronounced 2009 as a “lackluster” year for art, with these 10 exceptions.

1. “Allora and Calzadilla: Stop, Repair, Prepare,” Barbara Gladstone Gallery. The most hypnotic gallery experience of the year required five rotating pianists standing in a hole in the soundboard of a vintage Bechstein to play Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” upside down and backward, while pushing the instrument around the gallery and through the gaping crowd. I went six times.
2. “Picasso: Mosqueteros,” Gagosian Gallery. Whoever expected to discover the new Picasso in the old one? Tightly edited by Picasso’s biographer, John Richardson, this show of late portraits could not have been more revealing of a painter having the time of his long creative life.



Photograph by Eric Baudouin; Photograph by David Regen
Allora & Calzadilla/Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, NY
Pablo Picasso, “Tête d’homme du 17^{ème} siècle de face,” 1967; Allora and Calzadilla, “Stop, Repair, Prepare,” 2009.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Bequest of Robert Treat Paine, II; MOCA, Los Angeles, purchased with money provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and Douglas S. Cramer
Paul Cézanne, “Madame Cézanne in a Red Armchair,” 1877; Barbara Kruger, “Untitled (It’s a small world but not if you have to clean it),” 1990.

3. “Cézanne and Beyond,” The Philadelphia Museum of Art. This intoxicating 100-year survey of modern and contemporary artists (Matisse, Picasso, Johns, Marden) inspired by at least one Cézanne painting offered a masterwork at nearly every step. Pure pleasure.
4. “Collection: MOCA’s First Thirty Years,” The Los Angeles museum’s anniversary exhibition offered everything a great museum collection should: top-drawer examples of seminal art (including the Barbara Kruger work above) donated by discerning — and generous — patrons in a perfectly calibrated installation.
5. Pipilotti Rist’s “Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters),” Museum of Modern Art. The sexy visual lyricism and winking humor of Rist’s large-scale video projections did the impossible, utterly humanizing MoMA’s impersonal atrium and turning it into a giant pink, kick-off-your-shoes womb of a viewing room.
6. Performa 09. New York’s third biennial of performance art was more accessible, professional and provocative than the two previous editions, opening with a D.I.Y. dinner designed by Jennifer Rubell that was also a fantastic performance of social engineering.
7. Prospect I: New Orleans Biennial. The sometimes jarring, often elevating exhibitions and single-artist installations of this wildly ambitious project gave a contemporary spin to nearly every area and aspect of a unique and beleaguered city still in thrall to its antebellum history and voodoo mystique. Sobering and inebriating at once.
8. Rob Pruitt’s First Annual Art Awards at the Guggenheim Museum and Francesco Vezzoli’s “Ballets Russes Italian Style (The Shortest Musical You Will Never See Again),” with Lady Gaga, at MOCA in Los Angeles. These two extravagant, one-time-only performances tie for taking a long drink of Hollywood celebrity, glamour and showmanship and spiking it with taste. Self-parody at its best.
9. “Francis Bacon: A Centenary Retrospective,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art. One man’s obsessions with beauty, savagery and sexuality on gorgeous, gluttonous display.
10. Artur Zmijewski, “Democracies,” X Initiative. Twenty videos documenting European rallies, strikes, uprisings and state funerals in either edited news footage or historical reconstructions was an absorbing and impressive examination of television as a tool of political power and manipulation. Nothing new. Just excellent.