

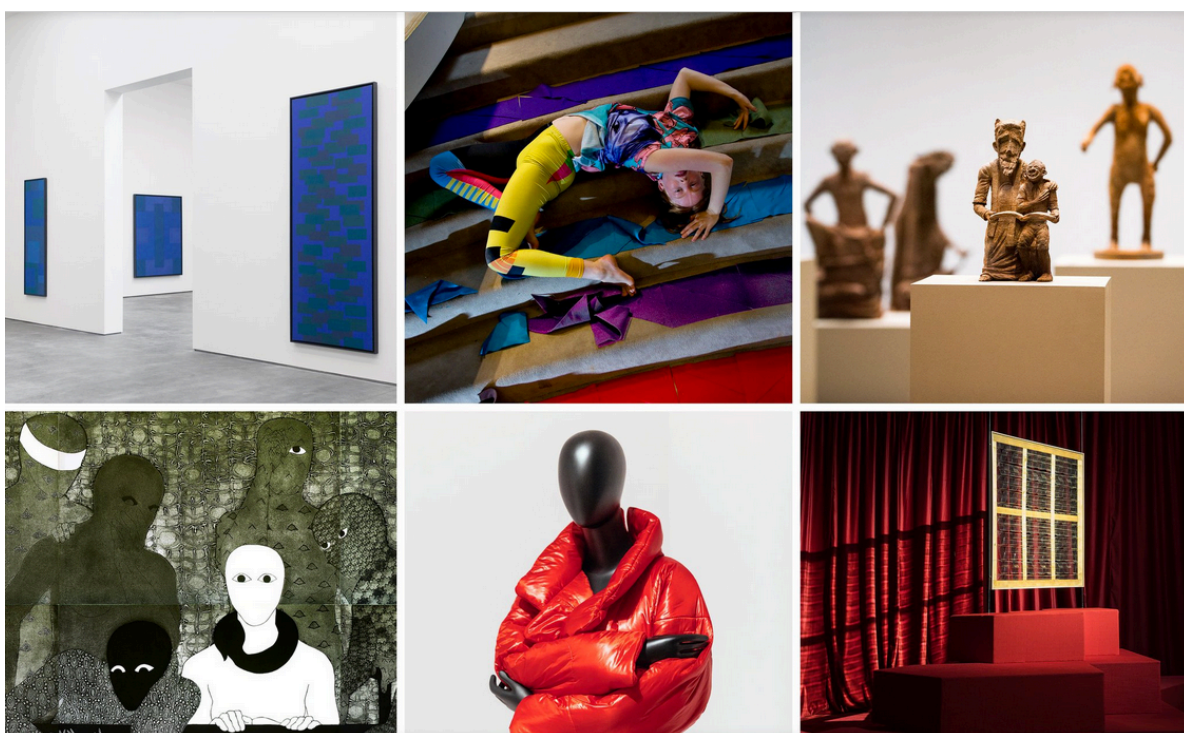
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JITISH KALLAT

THE NEW YORK TIMES.COM, December 6, 2017

The Best Art of 2017



The most gripping and engaging art of the year included wild actions, unusual wearables and unexpected materials (like chocolate).

Clockwise from top left: 2017 Estate of Ad Reinhardt/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London; Ryan McNamara; Joshua Bright for The New York Times; Delfino Sisto Legnani and Marco Cappelletti, Fondazione Prada; Mark Wickens for The New York Times; Estate of Belkis Ayón, via Landau Traveling Exhibitions

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THE NEW YORK TIMES.COM, December 6, 2017

The art critics of The New York Times Roberta Smith, Holland Cotter and Jason Farago share their picks for the best art of the year.

Holland Cotter

Bad-dream Washington politics. White nationalism. Sexual predation. Add the spectacle of a flatulent art market raking in endless cash, and 2017 feels like a good year to say goodbye to. But there were positive things. The following meant the most to me:

10. LASTING IMPRESSIONS Here are three 2017 events still strong in my memory:

[“Detroit After Dark,”](#) at the Detroit Institute of Arts, a show of nocturnal photographs from the museum’s holdings, has stayed with me like a slow tune. The after-hours tour opened with a Robert Frank shot from the 1950s, when the city was still a powerhouse; wound through gradually dimming streets; stopped at jazz clubs; lingered in punk and hip-hop spots. A 2016 view by Dave Jordano of the hulking Michigan Train Depot, ablaze with brand-new, gentrifying lights, brought a moody song to an inconclusive end: not upbeat, not downbeat, something else.

At the Philadelphia Museum of Art last winter, the Mumbai-based artist Jitish Kallat had an extraordinary installation called [“Covering Letter.”](#) In it, a projected video image of a letter written by Mohandas Gandhi to Adolf Hitler just weeks before the start of World War II scrolled slowly down a screen made of billowing artificial fog. Gandhi, who believed in the political efficacy of offering friendship, tries to persuade the Nazi leader to change his destructive course. But aggression doesn’t listen; over and over we watched Gandhi’s words descend into oblivion.

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In November, when “Pacific Standard Time” opened, I went on a press tour that the Chicana artist Judith F. Baca led of [“The Great Wall of Los Angeles,”](#) a huge mural that she initiated in 1976 with the help of 80 young people referred by the city’s criminal justice department. Done on the wall of a drainage canal, the painting illustrates the history of California as seen through immigrant eyes, with particular attention paid to civil rights advances and abuses. Over the decades, with money tight, progress on the mural has been sporadic; the history runs only through the 1950s, though painting is soon to begin again. Even incomplete, it’s a great American work. Walking it with Ms. Baca was one of the season’s peak moments. Because, in a year when the combination of “great” and “America” sounded incompatible and corrupt to me, it was a walk with a different history, and a history I feel I want to live.