ARTnews

The Defining Artworks of 2022

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In 2022, art roared back. Blockbuster exhibitions returned, and the world's top art festivals, including the Venice Biennale and Documenta, did as well. Historical study of past works continued apace, and new artworks were added to the canon. Although artists had been making art with the same passion during the pandemic as they did before, this year the energy was especially palpable.

Across the world this year, artists continued exploring the ways that racism, colonialism, and misogyny shape society, and they did so as vitally as ever. Their work offered powerful views into alternate universes devoid of these poisonous prejudices while also staring down realities that must be contended with.

Along the way, it became obvious that the study of art history must change too. Artists of color and women artists who had been dealing with these topics for decades were suddenly seen anew, and the works they produced seemed ever more notable. With the understanding that nothing is fixed, experts also upended past conceptions about famous works, even at one point discovering that a beloved abstraction had been hanging upside-down for years.

To look back on the past 12 months in art-making, below is a survey of some of the most important artworks made or presented in a new light in 2022.

25

Alithia Haven Ramirez, Google Doodle (2022)

Alithia Ramirez's drawing for the Google Doodle contest.

Photo : Courtesy Google

In March, Alithia Haven Ramirez submitted a drawing as part of the Doodle for Google contest, which allows children to compete to have their artwork displayed on the search engine's homepage. The work that the 10-year-old sent in features a girl and her pet sitting together on a couch. About two months later, Ramirez, 18 other children, and two adults were killed by a gunman who opened fire at Robb Elementary school in Uvalde, Texas. Seen in that light, the drawing now serves as a poignant reminder of the lives lost due to gun violence.

While the piece did not advance to the contest's final rounds, Google **highlighted her work** by displaying it on a special page intended to honor her and other victims of the shooting. Additionally, when he visited Uvalde, President Joe Biden vowed to hang one of Ramirez's drawings in the White House. —*Francesca Aton*

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Winslow Homer, *The Gulf Stream* (1899/1906)

Winslow Homer, *The Gulf Stream*, 1899/1906.

Photo : Art Institute of Chicago

What, exactly, did Homer mean when he painted a Black man reclining on a partially wrecked boat, beneath which choppy waters and sharp-toothed sharks loom? This image, memorably depicted in *The Gulf Stream*, is an ambiguous one, so it's no surprise scholars and artists have obsessed over it for over a century. And it was hardly a shock when, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Homer retrospective this year, curators Stephanie Herdrich and Sylvia Yount placed the painting front and center. But it was the unusual way that the curators approached this work that made it feel so notable right now. They considered its context within Homer's career, which had seen him work in tropical locales like the Bahamas and Cuba, where he paid close attention to Black men and women who lived there. Then they expanded out the work's symbolism, suggesting that it was more than just a metaphorical scene about human endurance in the face of danger. Perhaps the work is really about the transatlantic slave trade, or even about the continued disenfranchisement faced because of it,

even after abolition. With that in mind, a whole new view of Homer's work emerges—an example of the manifold ways in which art history's mysteries only deepen as new critical lenses are taken up. *—Alex Greenberger*

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Tiona Nekkia McClodden, *Fig. VIII. W 22mm* (2022)

Tiona Nekkia McClodden, *Fig. VIII. W 22mm*, 2022.

Photo : ©Tiona Nekkia McClodden/Courtesy the artist and 52 Walker, New York

Tiona Nekkia McClodden's show at New York's 52 Walker gallery, one of the most talked about exhibitions this year by an emerging artist, featured *Fig. VIII. W 22mm* (2022), for which McClodden used Kydex, an industrial type of plastic used for knife sheathes, among other things, to cover a handgun. The Kydex looks like shrinkwrap, hugging the gun's

contours tight. Guns have become as American as apple pie—they've become symbols of either mass violence or Second Amendment rights, depending on who you ask. McClodden, a Black, lesbian artist from Philadelphia who learned how to shoot a gun following the destabilizing events of Covid and the George Floyd protests, doesn't give her weapon a single easily legible reading. Instead, she confronts every possible interpretation, offering it as something fearful, something that can save you, and something that is part of a larger system that can either oppress or empower you. *—Shanti Escalante-De Mattei*

22

Rebecca Belmore, *ishkode (fire)* (2022)

Rebecca Belmore, *ishkode (fire)*, 2022.

Photo : Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Belmore's sculpture *ishikode (fire)*, one of the most talked about pieces to come out of the Whitney Biennial, is a ghostly, imposing piece that the artist made using a sleeping bag that she cast in clay. It's a haunting figure, with one arm keeping the sleeping bag in place, and it's painted in a dull ochre that fades into dark brown. Encircled by several hundred bullets, this figure is stuck in as much as it is shaped by this sprawling metal trap. An

Anishinaabe artist, Belmore is drawing attention to the continued violence that Indigenous people face today in these supposedly “post-colonial” times. *—Shanti Escalante-De Mattei*

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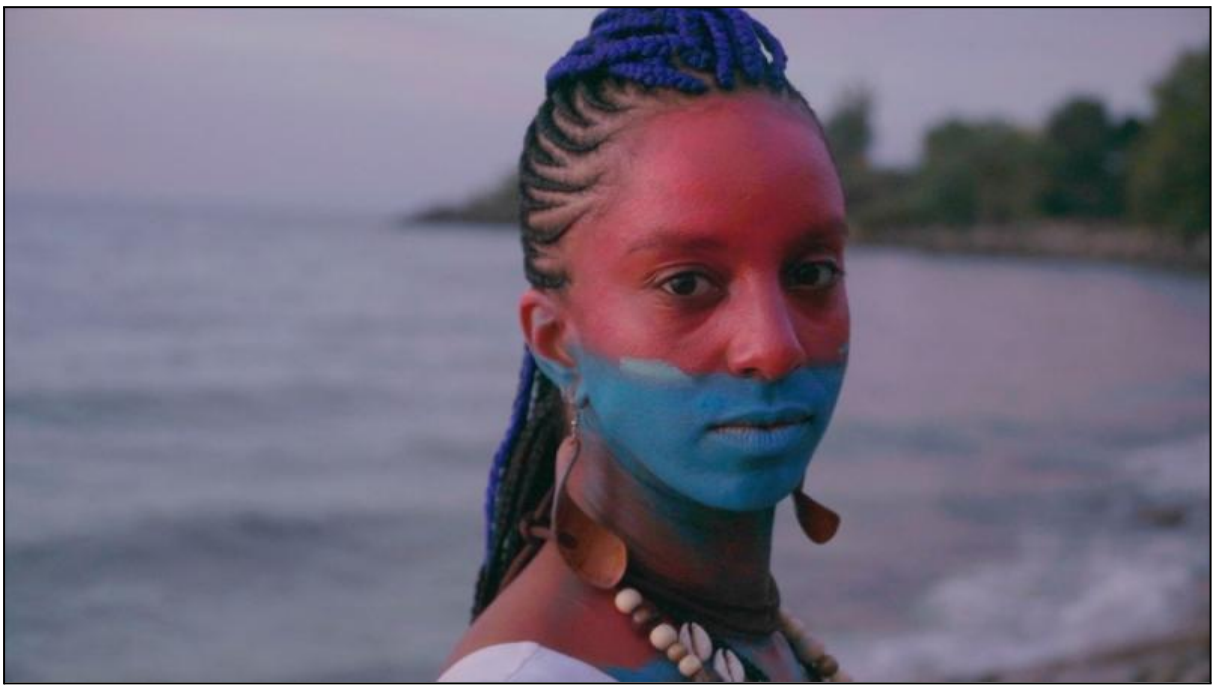
Camille Turner, *Nave* (2022)



Camille Turner, *Nave*, 2022.

Photo : Courtesy the artist

For this year’s Toronto Biennial of Art, artist Camille Turner collaborated with writer Yaniya Lee to create an internal brief that provides context to the ways in which various Black histories in Toronto have been purposefully buried and erased. In addition to this important work, her commission for the show built upon her dissertation research into Canada’s own entanglement with the transatlantic slave trade. For many, Canada has historically been seen as the bastion of freedom, the final stop on the Underground Railroad, but Turner has been working to uncover the more insidious side of Canada’s involvement. During the 18th century, builders deforested a large swath of Newfoundland, and in the process built at least 19 ships that would ultimately depart to Africa and carry enslaved people back across the Atlantic. In order to reach Africa, these slave ships had to be loaded up with stones from Newfoundland to serve as ballast to ensure that the ships could make the first journey. Those stones would then be abandoned in Africa. In a moving three-channel video, Turner envisions this journey, starting from a Newfoundland church that would have been built with the same timber as those ships. It’s a moving, poetic, and ultimately haunting film that forces viewers to reckon with this past and how so many histories like this remain to be uncovered. *—Maximilíano Durón*

20

Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with a Flute* (1665–70)

Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with a Flute*, 1665–70.

Photo : Via Wikimedia Commons

Johannes Vermeer's *Girl with a Flute* (1665–70) made headlines in October when the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. stripped the painting of its attribution. One of four in the National Gallery's collection, the small oil painting is a portrait of a girl in a blue fur coat and a conical hat clutching a gold flute. After carefully analyzing the painting, experts noticed that it lacked Vermeer's typical precision and that the final layer of paint contained coarsely ground pigments inconsistent with the artist's usual smooth finish. While they believe the piece was made by an associate of Vermeer, there are no surviving records of the existence of a workshop, students, or assistants. In November, the Rijksmuseum in

Amsterdam reversed the National Gallery's decision and reinstated the painting's Vermeer attribution. Next year, at the Rijksmuseum, its wall label will bear the Dutch Old Master's name when it appears in the largest exhibition ever devoted to Vermeer. *—Francesca Aton*

19

Banu Cennetoğlu, *right?* (2022)

Banu Cennetoğlu, *right?*, 2022.

Photo : Photo Sean Eaton/Courtesy the artist and Rodeo, London and Piraeus

Each edition of the Carnegie International boasts an iconic takeover of the Pittsburgh Museum's gilded age atrium. This year, for a show dealing with political forms of abstraction and illegibility, the Turkish artist Banu Cennetoğlu filled the space with golden balloons. Each bouquet of helium-filled mylar letters spells out an article from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations in 1948. When the show opened in September, the balloons were full and floating, but over the run of the show, their helium has slowly depleted, and the work's tone has changed, too. Cennetoğlu wanted to highlight the false sense of security that political rhetoric can offer, remind viewers that promises don't always come to pass, and show how commitments often require constant care. *—Emily Watlington*

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Hélio Oiticica, *Subterranean Tropicália Projects: PN15* (1971/2022)

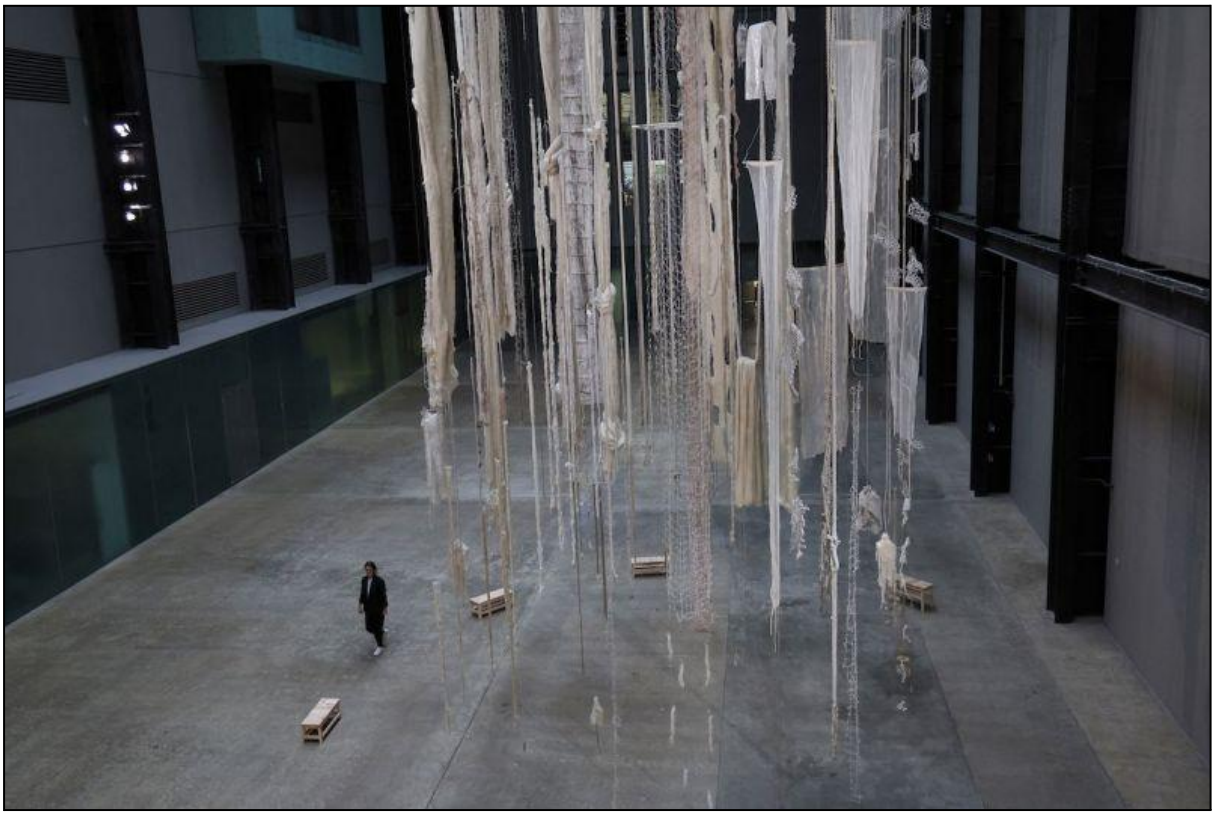
Hélio Oiticica, maquette for *Subterranean Tropicália Projects: PN15 Penetrable*, 1971.

Photo : Photo: Miguel Rio Branco; ©César and Claudio Oiticica

When Hélio Oiticica arrived in New York in the early 1970s, he was at the peak of his career. Already well-established in his native Brazil, and with important showings in London and New York under his belt, he came to the city on a Guggenheim Fellowship ready, to create something truly awesome in the form of a monumental public artwork that would take over Central Park. It wasn't staged at the time, due to bureaucratic red tape that Oiticica faced, but a maquette for that work was included in his traveling retrospective that landed at the Whitney Museum in 2017, and the possibilities the project offered were endlessly fascinating. (He eventually created scaled-down versions, with the hope that they might be realized; none of those were.) More than five decades later, an iteration of Oiticica's project, *Subterranean Tropicália Projects: PN15*, was finally realized at Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens, in collaboration with the artist's estate and the Americas Society. The installation was exhilarating, an olfactory sensation with a maze-like construction that led into a final space that were playing various moving-image works, including the only piece Oiticica finished in New York, a film about Mario Montez. It was truly an immersive experience. *—Maximilíano Durón*

17

Cecilia Vicuña, *Brain Forest Quipu* (2022)



Cecilia Vicuña, *Brain Forest Quipu*, 2022.

Photo : Photo Isabel Infantes/AFP via Getty Images

The artists commissioned for Tate Modern's Turbine Hall succeed or fail based on how well they are able to adapt this massive space for their work. For **her commission**, Cecilia Vicuña did not even attempt to create something that would utilize every inch of the hall. Rather than trying to fill it to the brim, she installed two large-scale, airy quipus on either end. The overall effect was breathtaking for how fragile these massive sculptures looked. They seemed ready to break down at any second, but Vicuña's expert fashioning of textiles, shells, feathers, and more kept them intact. The two sculptural pieces were accompanied by two eight-hour sound quipus that would play over the thrum of the crowds who pass through. Audio of birds chirping, waves crashing, and drums beating rise, and stretches of silence follow. During Frieze London, shortly after the project's debut, Vicuña led a procession from the mezzanine level of Turbine Hall out to the Thames and back into the museum. Participants were asked to grab a tree branch, and we became a moving forest, with the goal of making an offering to the river in the form of leaves to atone for the destruction of the planet our species has engendered. The procession ended with various participants sharing their concerns for climate change, in yet another sign of how Vicuña's delicate art can make a mighty plea for action. —*Maximilíano Durón*

16

Raven Chacon, *Three Songs* (2021)

Raven Chacon, *Three Songs*, 2021.

Photo : Photo Ron Amstutz

How can sound help you see when an image cannot? The question sounds like a riddle, but it's the one that helps unfurl Raven Chacon's video installation *Three Songs*, which may appear to consist of little more than three women singing outdoors. In fact, these women—Sage Bond (Diné), Jehnean Washington (Yuchi), and Mary Ann Emarthle (Seminole)—are doing far more than that, since by intoning their songs and beating their drums, they are also keeping history alive. In their music, the women mention the horrors wrought against their communities—the centuries of displacement and violence brought by white colonizers on the land they once called their own. Now, in singing, they have found a new relationship to this land. Chacon, who is from the Navajo Nation, has called their music a form of "sonic testimony," as apt a term as any for a form of resistance that deliberately skirts any traditional definitions. *—Alex Greenberger*

15

Xaviera Simmons, *Align* (2022)

Xaviera Simmons, *Align*, 2022.

Photo : Courtesy Queens Museum

At the center of the Queens Museum's atrium-like exhibition space stands a massive rectangular room, measuring some 40 feet. Painted on its exterior, in capital white letters on a black background, is a powerful manifesto by artist Xaviera Simmons that reads, in various parts, "Crisis makes a book club," a clear nod to "a group of very wealthy, very influential and very seasoned white women in the arts, philanthropy and academia" who started book clubs geared toward leaning about racism and how to be anti-racist in the wake of George Floyd's murder in 2020, as **she told** the *New York Times*. Her aim is to point out that simply reading these books, especially from positions of privilege, power, and safety, will not spur progress. Action and activism really need to take place for change to come about that will ensure the survival of Black, Indigenous, Brown, and queer and trans people. This work is meant as a wake-up call for white allies. This time around, maybe they'll do more than just read. —*Maximilíano Durón*

14

Charles Gaines, *Moving Chains*, 2022

Charles Gaines, *Moving Chains*, 2022.

Photo : Photo Timothy Schenck

In the works for nearly a decade, *Moving Chains* is the first public artwork by Charles Gaines, who is best known for a heady Conceptual art practice that uses rigorous formulas and systems. Working with Creative Time and Governors Island Arts, Gaines crafted this 110-foot-long sculpture with the hull of a wooden ship in mind. Above, running the length of the sculpture, are a series of nine massive chains; eight of them move to match the currents of New York's Harbor, while the ninth and central chain is set faster, at the rate it would take for a ship to pass through these currents.

To get to Governors Island, where Gaines's sculpture is on view until June (with a seasonal pause during the winter), most viewers will take a short ferry ride from Lower Manhattan. The neighborhood played a key role in the transatlantic slave trade, acting as the site where enslaved people were auctioned and later as the country's capital of commerce, where white-owned banks that made their fortune from slavery in the South set up their headquarters. How all that ripples out to the present is a clear reference point for this work. But Gaines has said he also wanted to reflect on the infamous Dred Scott decision of 1857, through which any person of African descent, whether enslaved or freed, could not be a U.S. citizen. Though the decision was nullified upon the ratification of the 14th Amendment in 1868, Gaines intended the work, as he says in a Creative Time–produce video, "to address the idea that in order to produce this kind of economy, they had to legitimate slavery. And so

the Dred Scott trial was at a pivotal moment of that legitimation. It becomes a real emblem of, what I call, the fatal flaw that exists at the foundation of American democracy."
—Maximilíano Durón

13

Zineb Sedira, *Dreams Have No Titles* (2022)

Zineb Sedira, *Dreams Have No Titles*, 2022.

Photo : Photo Thierry Bal

French filmmakers of the postwar era tended to view their own medium with suspicion, arguing that it offered fantasies that were totally divorced from real-life issues. But what if those cinematic dreams *can* offer fodder for political engagement? This is the question that haunts Zineb Sedira's tour-de-force essay film *Dreams Have No Titles*, which was shown at the Venice Biennale's French Pavilion this year. In this work, Sedira casts about for filmic evidence of the Algerian struggle for independence, which seemed to have everything and nothing to do with leftist cinema of the era, given that the movement was attractive to Italian and French directors while the actual voices of those involved were largely not. (Sedira has personally worked to preserve Algerian films from that time, including the 1964–65 Casbah Films production *Les Mains Libres*, by the Italian filmmaker Ennio Lorenzini, which was thought to be lost until the artist found a print of it.) She shot herself viewing films about the subject by Ettore Scola, Luchino Visconti, and Gilles Pontecorvo, and then recreating the

imagery seen within those films, sometimes using the French Pavilion's curators—Yasmina Reggad, Sam Bardaouil, and Till Fellrath—as her actors. She even at times appears to digitally suture herself into those sets, piling on the layers of meta. Amid it all, Sedira finds empowerment, with others' fiction enhancing her own colorful reality. *—Alex Greenberger*

12

Ernie Barnes, *The Sugar Shack* (1976)

Ernie Barnes, *The Sugar Shack*, 1976.

Photo : Christie's

Momentum around Ernie Barnes has been building since 2019, when Los Angeles's California African American Museum held a survey that sparked new interest in the athlete-turned-painter. But even with that in mind, it was still a surprise when Barnes's 1976 painting *The Sugar Shack* became one of the star lots of the May auction season in New York. The work, a nightlife scene showing dancers at a segregated North Carolina dance hall, attracted more than 20 interested buyers during a Christie's evening sale. Gradually, as the price ascended into the millions, the competition thinned out, and two bidders helped push the work to its staggering hammer price of $13 million. That figure was roughly 80 times its $150,000 low estimate; Houston-based former hedge-funder Bill Perkins had won it for a

final price of $15.3 million with fees. Perkins later loaned the work to the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, solidifying Barnes's place within the country's top institutions, if only temporarily. Perkins described the purchase as "a realization of a childhood dream."
—Angelica Villa

11

Hew Locke, *The Procession* (2022)

Hew Locke, *The Procession*, 2022.

Photo : Maximilíano Durón/ARTnews

One of the most talked-about works to hit London this year was Hew Locke's commission for the central hall of Tate Britain's neoclassical building. Stretching the length of this airy space, *The Procession* presents dozens of figures—clad in intricate and vibrant garments—as they are caught, as the title alludes, in the middle of a procession. What they are walking for is not entirely clear. Is it for a Carnival celebration, as some of the more brightly dressed revelers imply, with their large dresses that are signature in those festivals? Or is it for a funeral, as suggested by several figures in all black, some of whom carry a coffin-like sculpture? What's so fascinating about this project is that it is a true sculpture in the round. You're able to walk at your own pace and observe these detailed garments is a sharp contrast from a regular

procession, where those walking pass by you after a few moments. Here you can study their garments, and in doing so, it becomes clear that there is much at play. Locke has fashioned their outfits and banners with various historical documents and photographs that reference the transatlantic slave trade and the role that Henry Tate, the museum's namesake, played in it. It's a complex and messy history, one that Locke refuses to let us shy away from.
—Maximilíano Durón

10

Baan Norg Collaborative Arts and Culture, *The Ritual of Things* (2022)

Baan Norg Collaborative Arts and Culture, *The Ritual of Things*, 2022.

Photo : Photo Nicholas Wefers

Ruangrupa, the collective behind Documenta 15, identified the Indonesian word "nongkrong" as one of the qunquiennial's guiding principles. It means "hanging out together," but as Minh Nguyen **wrote in *Art in America***, their approach was more about self-organizing and resource sharing than it was classic art world nepotism. There were many ways and many places to hang out in Kassel this summer, but one of the most prominent, iconic, and—importantly—easy to find was a graffitied skate ramp by Baan Norg Collaborative Arts and Culture, titled *The Ritual of Things*. You didn't need to be a skater to sit around the ramp's periphery and ogle or giggle as the brave and/or foolish kickflipped

and/or fumbled. But as with most Documenta 15 works, the project's most intriguing aspect was not on view and in fact took place outside the European Union. The Thai collective gathered donated used skateboards in Kassel, then took them back to Nong Pho, where they invited skaters to ride to the region's dairy farms, combining skating lessons with agricultural ones. The group hoped to empower the younger generation to get involved in sustainable agriculture that honors the locals, their land, and the Thai economy. *—Emily Watlington*

9

Jumana Manna, *Foragers* (2022)

Jumana Manna, *Foragers* (still), 2022.

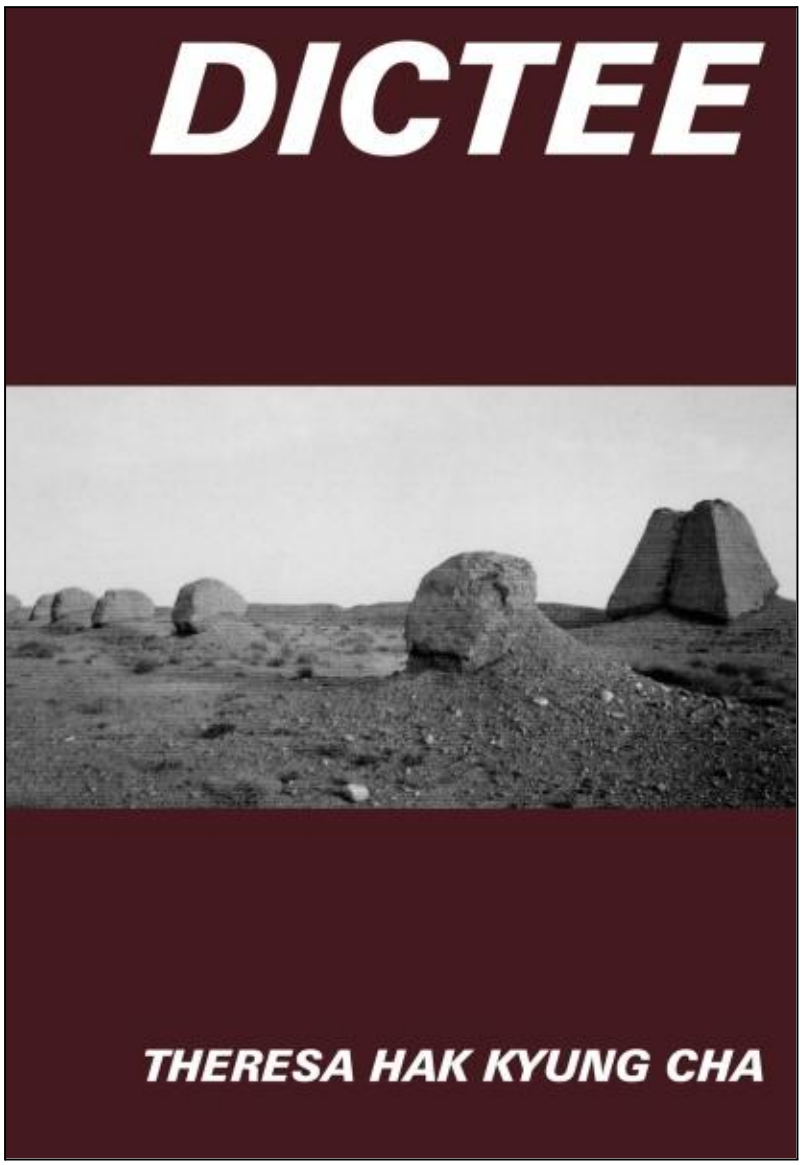
Photo : Courtesy the artist

Plants seem to retain an air of innocence even when the ground beneath them is understood as politically charged. Such is the case in Jumana Manna's *Foragers*, on view in her ongoing MoMA PS1 exhibition. The hour-long film discusses, through documentary and fictional scenes, the mechanics and implications of the Israeli government's ban on the foraging of wild herbs important to Palestinian culture and survival. Many of the scenes here are quiet, peaceful tracking shots of hills of variegated colors and textures traversed by Manna's own family members. Others are confrontational episodes in which actors resist accusations of illegal gathering and debate the supposedly negative impact this foraging has on the land. As Manna notes in a compelling essay written during the quarantine-induced hiatus in the film's production, "every act of protection is accompanied by an erasure of another kind. The key question is often not whether to safeguard, but how and at what cost." Few artists so

elegantly and emotionally meld questions about boundaries with understandings of interconnectivity. —*Mira Dayal*

8

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictee* (1982)



The cover of *Dictee*.

Photo : Courtesy University of California Press

“Dead words. Dead tongue. From disuse. Buried in Time’s memory. Unemployed. Unspoken. History… Restore memory… The ink spills thickest before it runs dry before it stops writing at all.” So concludes a section of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee,* first published just before her death, in 1982, and **republished this year** by the University of California Press. The book folds poetic, epistolary, documentary, and diaristic passages into translation exercises,

Xeroxed images, and visceral descriptions of how a body produces speech. Alongside Cha's recent monographic section of the Whitney Biennial and **exhibition at Bard College's Hessel Museum of Art**, *Dictee*'s new edition provided an occasion to establish Cha more firmly within history. Here is an artist and writer who modeled rich and complicated navigations of language and identity, and of displacement within each. —*Mira Dayal*

7

Precious Okoyomon, *To See the Earth Before the End of the World* (2022)

Precious Okoyomon, *To See the Earth Before the End of the World*, 2022.

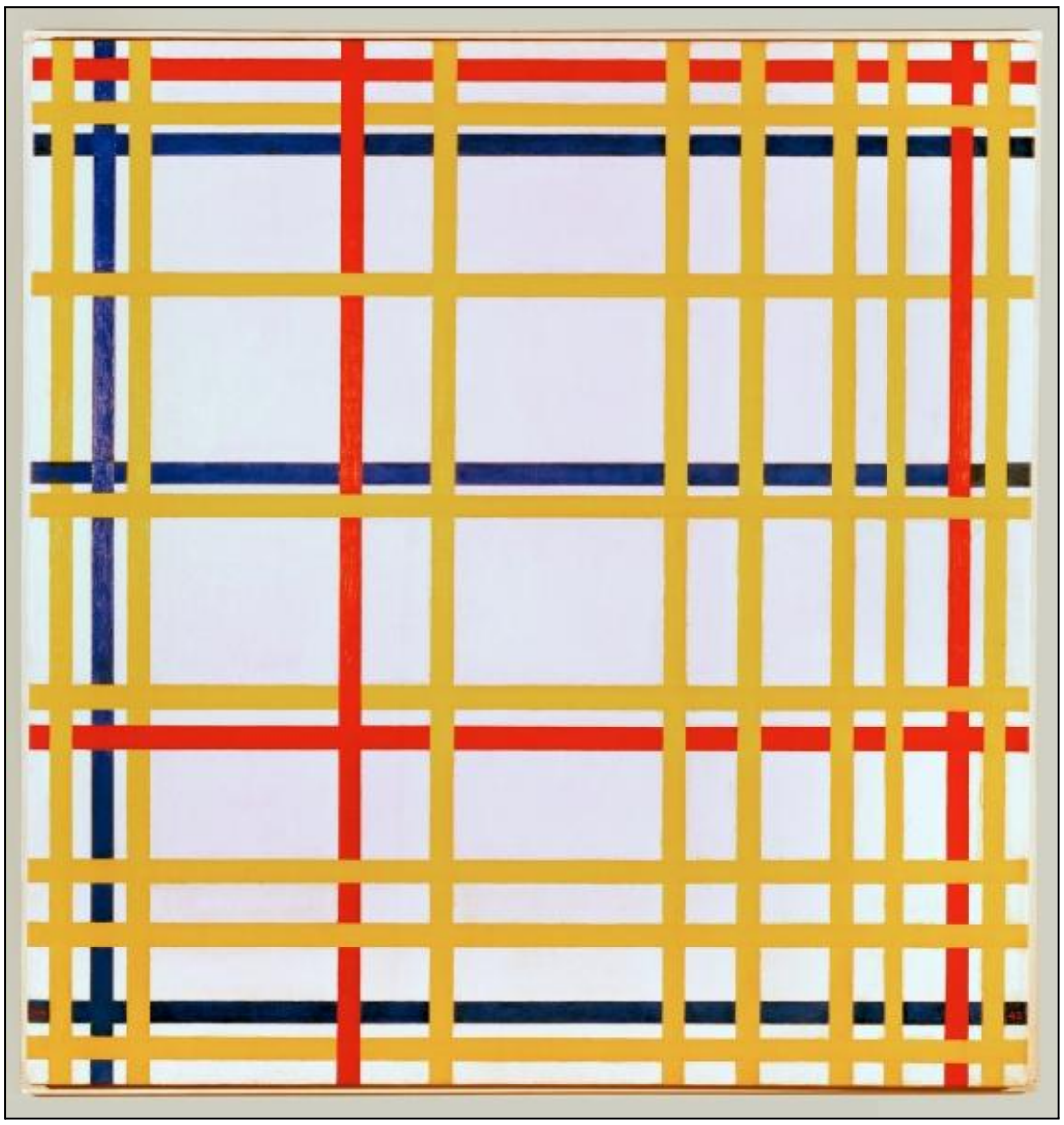
Photo : Getty Images

Of all the very big and very beautiful works in the main show of the Venice Biennale this year, none stood out quite like Precious Okyomon's room-filling installation *To See the Earth Before the End of the World*, its name a reference to a 2010 poem by Ed Roberson. But if Roberson's poem prophesies an impending apocalypse with a degree of bitterness, Okyomon did something similar with beauty and boldness. The installation took the form of something like a garden whose beds are filled not with colorful blooms but weedy kudzu, an invasive plant species brought from China and Japan to the U.S. In something of an anti-colonial protest, the kudzu claimed its own space within an exhibition venue historically host mainly to white male artists. The mood here was contemplative and uplifting, and as viewers walked

across dirt pathways with water trickling beneath, they may have spotted a live butterfly or two. Standing guard were a series of faceless sculpted figures that appeared like deities transported to earth, ready to protect the lush area around them if needed. —*Alex Greenberger*

6

Piet Mondrian, *New York City 1* (1941)



Piet Mondrian, *New York City 1*, 1941.

Photo : Centre Pompidou

Appropriate for an age when few can lay convincing claim to knowing which way is up or down, Piet Mondrian's *New York City 1* resonated anew this year after suggestions that it has hung upside-down for 75 years. Citing discrepancies in pictorial evidence from the artist's

studio as well as an exhibition mounted not long after his death, a curator for a new Mondrian show at Germany's Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen K20 museum made the case that **the painting's orientation has been incorrect** in all the years since. But then she hung it as it had been shown before, and added a qualifier: "If I turn the work over, I risk destroying it," she said, adding "Perhaps there is no right or wrong alignment at all?" —*Andy Battaglia*

5

Michael Heizer, *City* (1970–2022)

Michael Heizer, *City*, 1970–2022.

Photo : Photo: Eric Piasecki/© Michael Heizer/Courtesy Triple Aught Foundation

Finally opened to visitors this year after five decades of toil in the Nevada desert, *City* counts as the most monumental creation of Michael Heizer on a long list of works that take monumentality as a given. Measuring in at 1 ¾ miles in length and ½ mile across, the scale of the work—a formidable complex of abstract earthen forms made with rocks, dirt, concrete, etc.—effectively makes conceptions of scale moot. And the fact that the experiential prospects of it are exclusive to **an experience that is now actually possible** makes its longstanding mystery all the more alluring. —*Andy Battaglia*

4

Laura Poitras, *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed* (2022)

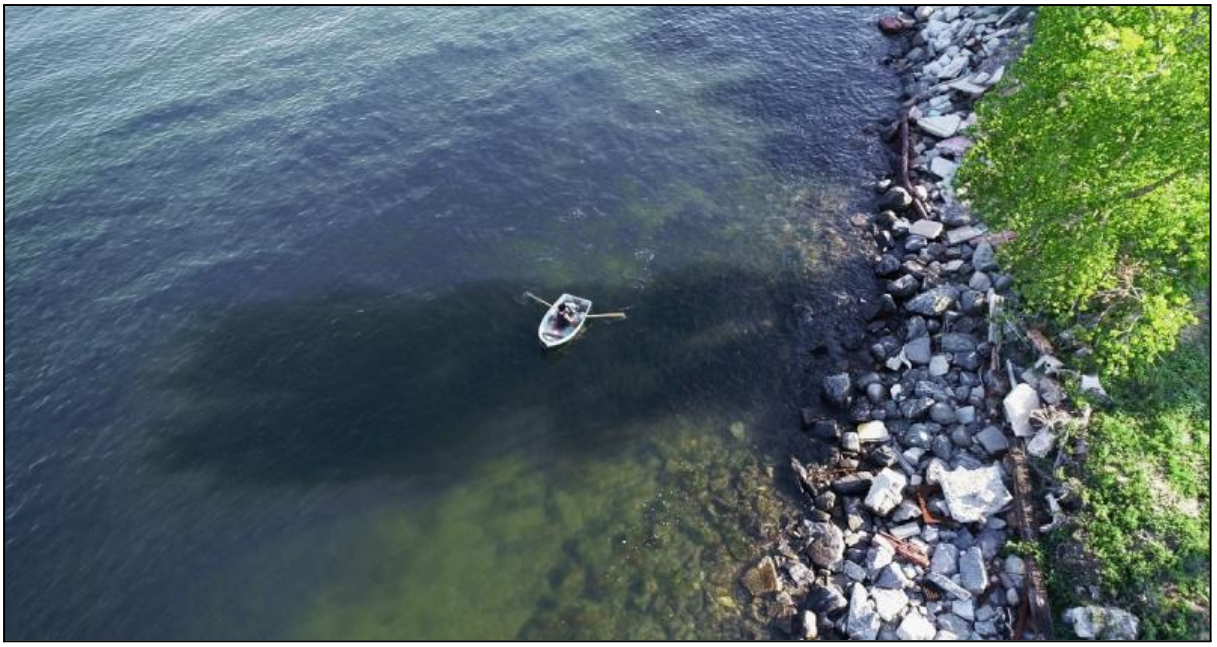
Still from *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed*.

Photo : Courtesy Neon Films

"It's easy to make your life into stories, but it's harder to sustain real memories," says the artist Nan Goldin midway through this rousing film about her, which succeeds not only in sustaining her real memories but in making them come positively alive. **Laura Poitras's documentary**, which won the top prize at the Venice Film Festival this year, is a double portrait of its subject, in a sense—a tribute to her life and art that packs an emotional wallop, and a grand look inside her anti-Sackler activism, waged against the family who produced the painkillers to which she became addicted. The magic of Poitras's film is that the two halves cannot be separated from each other. A flavorful ode to the New York arts scene of years past, a making-of report on some of the best photographs ever taken, a battle cry, an impassioned sob, a joyous hurrah: *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed* is all of these things, and then some. How lucky we are to have an artist like Goldin among us. —*Alex Greenberger*

3

Coco Fusco, *Your Eyes Will Be an Empty Word* (2021)



Coco Fusco, *Your Eyes Will Be an Empty Word*, 2021.

Photo : Courtesy the artist

It is still too soon to say what the defining artworks about the current pandemic will be, although it seems fair to suggest that Coco Fusco's video *Your Eyes Will Be an Empty Word* is highly likely to become one of them. Fusco's subject is Hart Island, a landmass near the Bronx that has been used as a burial ground for the unidentified for well over a century. In 2020, Hart Island took on a new valence, becoming the place where the unclaimed bodies of those who'd fallen ill with Covid and died were taken and buried by prisoners from Rikers Island. Using drone photography, Fusco's camera looms high above, capturing the island as if from the point of view of one of the nameless who passed. Periodically, however, her camera ventures downward, closer to the water, where Fusco can be seen in a boat, rowing solo and dropping flowers into the Long Island Sound. Shown at this year's Whitney Biennial, the video acts as a memorial for the unknown Covid victims buried nearby, whom Fusco has postulated may have been immigrants or houseless, and as a reminder these people died with others by their side, even if they did not know it. As artist Pamela Sneed says in the video's tender narration, "The bodies lie together alone." *—Alex Greenberger*

2

Paula Rego, "Abortion Series" (1998)

Works from Paula Rego's "Abortion Series," on view in her 2021 Tate Britain survey.

Photo : Photo Tim P. Whitby/Getty Images

Bodily sovereignty is a topic many artists have broached time and again, but this issue took on greater prevalence than usual this year after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, ending 60 years of constitutional rights to an abortion. In the wake of the reversal, many began looking to past artworks to help speak to the present moment. Jenny Holzer **released an NFT** based on her "Truisms" series, a group of text-based pieces that has included famed phrases such as "Abuse of Power Comes as No Surprise." This one was based on a viral image of conservative pundit Tucker Carlson above a news chyron that reads, "MAKING AN INFORMED CHOICE REGARDING YOUR OWN BODY SHOULDN'T BE CONTROVERSIAL"; funds from the NFT's sales went toward pro-choice organizations Planned Parenthood, the Center for Reproductive Rights, and Population Action International. Barbra Kruger made **her own text-based poster**, which was shared on the Instagram page of the New York gallery David Zwirner. In her signature bold black Futura font it reads: "IF THE END OF ROE IS A SHOCK THEN YOU HAVEN'T BEEN PAYING ATTENTION." And the Whitney Museum put on view **Juanita McNeely's paintings** about her experience of learning she had a malignant tumor while she was pregnant.

But it was a series of a works from the '90s by Paula Rego, who died this year, that seemed particularly prescient. In 1998, Rego began a series of abortion pictures inspired by the narrow defeat of a referendum to legalize abortion in her native country of Portugal. She

drew young women in claustrophobic settings, in emotional and physical agony from illegal procedures. The resulting paintings based on them—and Rego's willingness to discuss her own abortion—shifted public consciousness around a taboo topic, and is credited with the second successful referendum on the issue in Portugal. "It seems unbelievable that these battles have to be fought all over again. It's grotesque," Rego **told the *Guardian*** in 2019. "I'm doing what I can with my work but both men and women need to stand up to this. It affects men too. You don't get pregnant on your own do you?" —*Tessa Solomon*

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Simone Leigh, "Sovereignty" (2022)

Simone Leigh's bronze sculpture *Satellite* installed in front of *Façade*, both 2022, at the US Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

Photo : Photo Timothy Schenck/Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

The best thing about Simone Leigh's U.S Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, titled "Sovereignty," was the utter transformation of the neo-Palladian structure itself, a visual decolonization achieved by covering the exterior in a low-hanging thatched roof with wooden supports. This was only the first sign that Leigh, the first Black woman to represent the U.S. at the Venice Biennale, had crafted something truly special. Her exhibition's germinating idea was the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris, where colonizing nations showed off their

cultures and, sometimes, actual people of their territories in demeaning displays that reinforced stereotypes.

Inside the pavilion, deceptively simple sculptures celebrated traditional African forms while calling out colonialist tropes. *Last Garment*, for example, a washerwoman bent over her work in a reflecting pool, is a direct quote of a colonial postcard circulated by the British government to encourage tourism to Jamaica, where the natives, rest assured, were hard-working and clean. Works like that one sounded a powerful declaration of self-determination. Leigh's clear, forceful statement will continue to be heard next year in the U.S. when a 20-year survey of her work, including the pavilion, kicks off a national tour at the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, which commissioned Leigh's Biennale presentation. —*Stephanie Cash*

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