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The Defining Artworks of 2024

BY THE EDITORS OF ARTNEWS

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DANIELA HRITCU/ARTNEWS

Crumbling amber, a nonbinary deity, a horned woman, a disco ball formed from synthetic hair: all these things and more appeared in the year's most memorable artworks. Produced

during a time that was as chaotic as any other in recent history, these works made powerful pleas for liberation (particularly in Gaza, where Israel's war continues on), pushed at the limits of traditional mediums such as painting and sculpture, and contended with the knotty histories that span centuries.

A bias toward contemporary art has pervaded museums across the globe for decades now, but as this year proved, work from past eras can just as much define the present as pieces made in the past couple years. Age-old structures bore witness to air strikes in Lebanon, the world's oldest figurative painting was found, and famed European paintings were reassessed beyond the West. At times, past, present, and future even mingled freely as artists thought through the pain of colonialism.

Where is art going in 2025 and beyond? That's anyone's guess—the art scene is growing increasingly big as more diverse perspectives are lured in and as new technologies reshape the present. But there may be some clues in our grouping of the 25 defining artworks of 2024, ranked by importance below.

[Read more of our “2024: Year in Review” coverage here.](https://www.artnews.com/p/2024-year-in-review/)
[\(https://www.artnews.com/p/2024-year-in-review/\)](https://www.artnews.com/p/2024-year-in-review/)

25 Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Harem in the Kiosk*, 1870–75



Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Harem in the Kiosk*, 1870–75.

Photo : Lusail Museum

While much of the buzz over the current survey of Jean-Léon Gérôme at Qatar’s Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art has centered around **the alleged censorship of a work** (<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/inci-eviner-mathaf-museum-censorship-harem-jean-leon-gerome-1234724745/>) by Inci Eviner, the show itself should not be overlooked. The 19th-century French artist was arguably the progenitor of Orientalism in visual art, creating images of North Africa and the Middle East that were acclaimed in their day and are now evidence of a European colonial worldview eloquently dismantled by Edward Said in his famed 1978 book, *Orientalism* (whose cover is graced by a Gérôme painting). The Mathaf show, cheekily titled “Seeing Is Believing,” was organized in collaboration with the future Lusail Museum, which will house the world’s largest

collection of Orientalist art when it opens in 2029. The show uniquely treats Gérôme's work to a strong critique without dismissing the beauty and attraction of his paintings depicting courts, harems, and mosques in lavish detail and color. *The Harem in the Kiosk* is a particularly sumptuous example of a point raised in the Mathaf show, but often forgotten in Said's argument: Orientalism was effective precisely because of how attractive it was. *The Harem in the Kiosk* shows us that and more. —Harrison Jacobs

24 Charlie Engman, *Cursed*, 2024





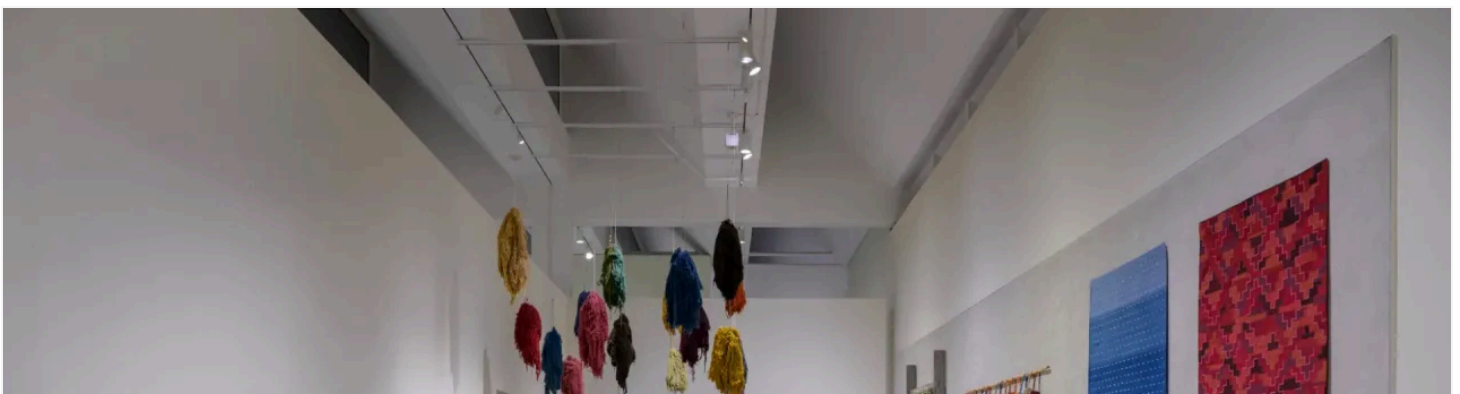
Charlie Engman, *Cursed*, 2024.

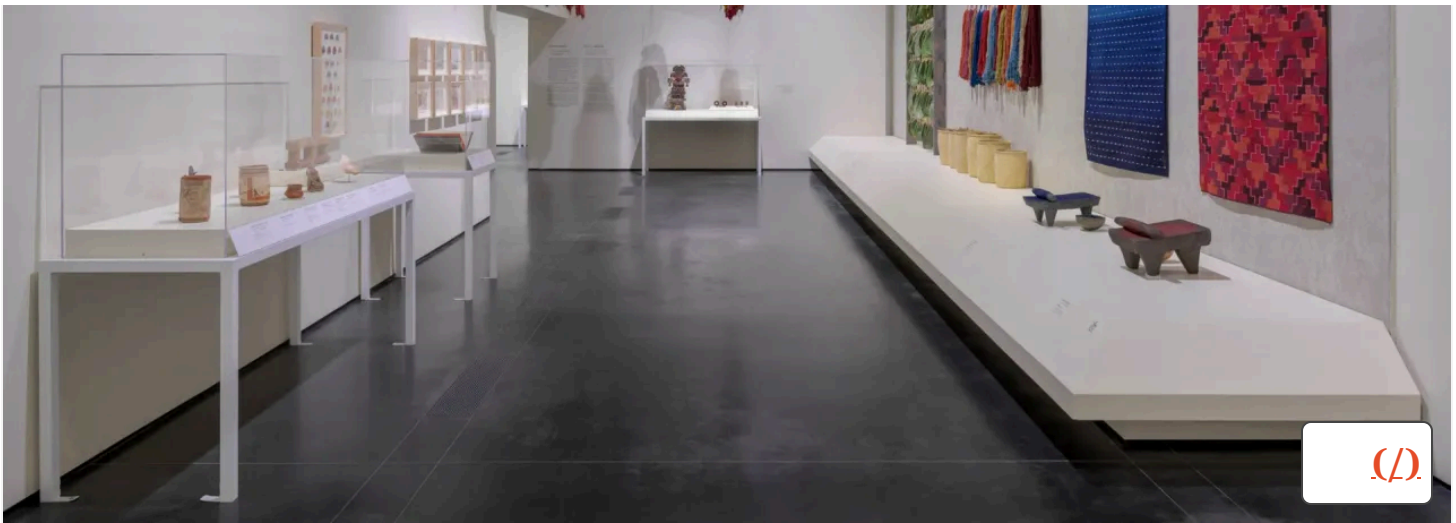
Photo : Courtesy of the artist, SPBH Editions, and MACK

A lot of art made using AI has been lazy, uninspired, and more interested in gee-whiz fireworks than any real critique. Not so for artist and photographer Charlie Engman, whose 2024 book *Cursed* turns generative AI inside out. *Cursed* uses and accentuates the technology's inherently distortive nature to produce strange, uncanny, and often humorous images that blur the boundaries between the individual artist and collective authorship. Bodies morph, combine with other objects and animals, or contort in impossible poses in images that are as strange as they are subtly beautiful. Here, AI's failure to render reality isn't a fault but a virtue.

In a recent [essay \(https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/you-dont-hate-ai-you-hate-capitalism-1234717804/\)](https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/you-dont-hate-ai-you-hate-capitalism-1234717804/) for *Art in America* titled "You Don't Hate AI, You Hate Capitalism," Engman argued that AI technology is just another tool that artists can use to numbing, liberatory, or critical effect, depending on their approach. If other AI artists follow Engman and *Cursed* in using the technology to interrogate the underlying logic of its creation, sign us up. —Harrison Jacobs

23 Porfirio Gutierrez, *Linea del Tiempo*, 2024





Porfirio Gutierrez, *Linea del Tiempo*, 2024.

Photo : Courtesy the artist

A year after *Art in America* declared “**Fiber Is the New Painting** (<https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/fiber-is-the-new-painting-1234670658/>),” the medium has continued to show its versatility and power, forming the basis of two of the most well-received shows in **this year’s edition of PST ART** (<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/artists/pst-art-getty-exhibitions-indigenous-art-1234717730/>). Those two shows, at LACMA and UCLA’s Fowler Museum, also happen to center works by Porfirio Gutierrez. The California-based Zapotec textile artist finds new energy in reviving and reinterpreting Indigenous practices of natural dye production, via materials like cochineal insects, marigold flowers, black walnut, and indigo. The value in this technique and medium is no greater than in *Linea del Tempo*, an installation commissioned for LACMA’s ongoing “We Live in Painting: The Nature of Color in Mesoamerican Art” exhibition. In the work, Gutierrez has hung 18 wool skeins, each dyed a different shade. Every plant used in the dyes holds a record of the climate, ecology, and location of materials from when they were harvested. At a time when Indigenous art has received new levels of recognition in the mainstream art world, *Linea del Tiempo* typifies why: the work is formally thrilling, visually captivating, and—in a time of rising climate catastrophe—matter-of-factly demonstrates the inseparable relationship between humans and the natural world. —*Harrison Jacobs*

22 Duccio, *Maestà*, 1308–11



Duccio, *Healing of the Man Born Blind*, 1308–11.

Photo : Michael Bodycomb/©The Frick Collection

Three cheers for the return of the nerdy blockbuster, which seemed to have disappeared during the pandemic, when museums played it safe. One need look no further for proof of the resurgence than the Metropolitan Museum of Art's effervescent survey of trecento Sieneese art, a survey so good that the adjective once-in-a-lifetime is both appropriate and

insufficient to describe it. Picking a highlight from it is a punishing exercise, but Duccio's magisterial *Maestà* is a good candidate. Constructed in the 14th century and split apart in the centuries after, 8 of the altarpiece's 43 parts were reassembled at the Met, where viewers could marvel at Duccio's gold-leafed scenes depicting the life of Christ. Never before have all the pieces of the *Maestà*'s predella, its base, been reunited, and it's likely they will never be again. —Alex Greenberger

21 Arlene Shechet, "Girl Group," 2024



Arlene Shechet, *Midnight*, 2024.

Photo : David Schulze

sculpture park. Against these similar (and canonical) shapes, Arlene Shechet's 2024 suite of sculptures "Girl Group" stands out with its playful organic shapes and poppy colors (lemon yellow and baby pink). Her forms are considered from every angle. The sculptures are heavy and huge, yet have a striking levity about them—light in color, floating in form.

What "Girl Group" makes visible is how digital fabrication is changing sculpture, unlocking new forms and methods of working. Shechet is not the first to use such tools, but the series' lasting legacy will be the way she let her software transform everything about her shapes, emphasizing its role rather than trying to hide it: some curves, for instance, are left striated instead of smoothed out. And to top it all off, she created custom benches, inviting you to sit down and soak it all up. —*Emily Watlington*

20 **Agnieszka Kurant, *Risk Landscape*, 2024**



Agnieszka Kurant, *Risk Landscape*, 2024.

Photo : Courtesy MUDAM

For *Risk Landscape*, a commission for her recent show of the same name at Luxembourg's MUDAM Museum of Contemporary Art, Polish artist Agnieszka Kurant worked with data scientists and catastrophe modeling specialists to develop three holograms that predict, simulate, and monetize future scenarios that might arise out of financial, political, or climate crises. The models Kurant has created examine risk prediction to quantify the unknown. In doing so, Kurant critiques the limitations of these technologies, and the underlying artificial intelligence that powers them, and highlights the inherent unpredictability of a future shaped by humans, microorganisms, algorithms, and viruses. — *George Nelson*

19 **Maurizio Cattelan, *I piedi, insieme al cuore, portano la stanchezza e il peso della vita* (The feet, together with the heart, carry the tiredness and weight of life), 2024**



Maurizio Cattelan for the 2024 Vatican Pavilion.

Photo : Photo Lucas Blalock

If you took a vaporetto, or water taxi, past Venice's Giudecca Women's Prison between April and November this year, you couldn't have missed the monumental image of a pair of dirty feet, posed in the manner of Andrea Mantegna's *Lamentation of Christ*, that spread across the building's facade, rising high above the Grand Canal. Cattelan, of banana fame, was just one of eight artists included in the Vatican Pavilion's presentation for the Venice Biennale, curated by Bruno Racine, the director of Venice's Palazzo Grassi museum, and Chiara Parisi, the director of the Centre Pompidou-Metz. The rest of the exhibition's works shown inside the prison, Cattelan's was by far the most visible, and therefore the most criticized. Emily Watlington, *Art in America* senior editor, **concluded that presenting an artwork (<https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/aia-reviews/vatican-pavilion-venice-biennale-prison-maurizio-cattelan-1234703733/>)** that the women inside the prison could not see made Cattelan something of a sadist. That didn't stop the pope from visiting the show, nor did it stop Miuccia Prada, who happened to be on my tour. —*Sarah Douglas*



Minne Atairu, *Deshrined Ancestors*, 2024.

Photo : Courtesy of REDCAT

Artist and educator Minne Atairu described her 2024 AI and AR installation *Deshrined Ancestors* as a digital sculpture, assembled from “sixteen AI-generated artifacts curated from ten generations of foundational and fine-tuned machine learning models.” These “speculative prototypes” from a project initially called *IGÙN*, are the result of Atairu’s identification of a 17-year period in Benin after the 1897 British invasion for which there are no visual or archival records. During the invasion, British soldiers looted the royal archive of ancient artifacts, including the Benin Bronzes, items now held by 160 major institutions across the globe. The invasion also led artists to flee the capital and switch to subsistence farming.

Atairu used the machine-learning algorithm StyleGAN2—a dataset of images depicting looted Benin Bronzes—and text-to-image generators like DALL·E 2 to reproduce speculative images, videos, and 3D renderings of items that artists may have created during that 17-year span. Via a creative deployment of AI, Atairu simultaneously grapples with

that 17-year span. via a creative deployment of AI, Alana simultaneously grapples with significant and violent consequences of colonization: looted items in prominent museum collections and the racial bias and limits of a new kind of archive, AI image generators. The work is currently on view at the Los Angeles art space REDCAT (Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater).—Karen K. Ho

17 rafa esparza, *Mexica Falcon after Dewey Tafoya*, 2024



rafa esparza, *Mexica Falcon after Dewey Tafoya*, 2024.

Photo : Courtesy Prospect New Orleans

In the past, when he has been invited to participate in major biennials, rafa esparza has brought on other artists to work with him. His showing at Prospect.6 in New Orleans was

no different. In one section of the triennial's Ford Motor Plant venue, he showed with Dewey Tafoya and Zalika Azim, the trio collectively making one work together while also responding to each other's work.

The master printer of Self Help Graphics in LA, Tafoya often synthesizes pop culture and pre-Columbian imagery, as he did with his iconic *Mexica Falcon* print, in which the form of Han Solo's Millennium Falcon from *Star Wars* is rendered as if it were an Aztec sun stone carving. (Mexica is the name Aztecs gave themselves and the source word for Mexico.) In a tribute to Tafoya's work, a version of which is on view at Prospect, esparza created a scaled-up, three-dimensional version of the *Mexica Falcon* in adobe. Paying special attention to the site, esparza created the adobe from New Orleans soil and water from the Mississippi River, which runs past the Ford Motor Plant. As with much of esparza's practice, *Mexica Falcon after Dewey Tafoya* proves that collaboration can push artists' practices forward. — *Maximiliano Durón*

16 World's Oldest Known Cave Painting Found in Indonesia



An image of the cave painting from "Narrative cave art in Indonesia by 51,200 years ago" in the journal *Nature*.

Photo : Courtesy Nature and Griffith University.

A wild pig was painted with crude red pigment, standing at peace beside three human-like figures was painted some 51,200 years ago on the ceiling of a limestone cave in the Indonesian Island of Sulawesi. The discovery of this artwork marks **the world's oldest known cave painting** (<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/worlds-oldest-known-cave-painting-found-indonesia-1234711575/>), surpassing the previous record-holder by more than 10,000 years.

The scene in the Leang Karampuang cave in the Maros-Pangkep region of South Sulawesi province features a pig measuring 36 inches by 15 inches. The pig is shown standing upright by a group of people. Several smaller images of pigs were also found in the cave, and were similarly dated using a laser to assess a crystal called calcium carbonate that develops organically on the pigment. These works represent the earliest example of narrative storytelling in visual art. —*Francesca Aton*

15 Pablo Delano, *The Museum of the Old Colony*, 2024



Pablo Delano, *The Museum of the Old Colony*, 2024.

Photo : Courtesy Venice Biennale

Puerto Rican–born artist Pablo Delano’s 2024 installation, *The Museum of the Old Colony*, was among the standout works in Venice this year. The Biennale’s theme, “Foreigners Everywhere,” resonated deeply with the artist, who argued that Puerto Rico’s colonial status made it uniquely suited to the exhibition. Although Puerto Rico cannot have a national pavilion due to its political status as an “unincorporated” US territory, the paradox of the island’s being both a nation and not a nation—with a distinct culture and language juxtaposed against its US citizenship—makes it a fertile subject.

Delano’s installation employed old museum tropes like dioramas, archival photographs, film footage, and artifacts to explore themes of racism, anthropology, and the colonial gaze while highlighting the historical use of museums as tools of oppression and “othering.” *The Museum of the Old Colony*, which Delano called a “performative museum,” is at once sardonically funny and painfully embarrassing, a sort of looking glass through which people can see how a century of stereotypes and misconceptions of an entire culture have influenced perceptions of the island. —*Daniel Cassady*

14 **Mary Miss, *Greenwood Pond: Double Site*, 1989–96**



Mary Miss, *Greenwood Pond: Double Site*, 1989–96.

Photo : Photo Sydney Royal Welch/Courtesy the Cultural Landscape Foundation

In a moment when women artists are finally being recognized for their contributions to Land art, Mary Miss’s decades-old installation, *Greenwood Pond: Double Site*, proved prominent for its endurance. Commissioned by the Des Moines Art Center in Iowa, the sprawling earthwork—a sculptural incursion into and around a pond, with various walkways, ramps, and structural adornments—was left in limbo after the institution’s board, citing needed repair costs of \$2.6 million, voted in March to demolish it. After Miss sued to stop the action, a federal judge issued an injunction leading to a stalemate—an end result, the judge wrote, that is “an unsatisfying status quo: the artwork will remain standing (for now) despite being in a condition that no one likes but that the court cannot order

(or how) despite being in a condition that no one likes but that the court cannot stop anyone to change.” How the situation will play out over time remains an open question, but for a work Miss has described as “an outdoor classroom,” *Greenwood Pond* is a perfect case study in concerns around stewardship, preservation, and nature’s alternately malevolent and graceful ways. —*Andy Battaglia*

13 **Gustave Caillebotte, *Man at His Bath*, 1884**



Gustave Caillebotte, *Homme au Bain*, 1884.

Photo : ©2024 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

At first glance, Gustave Caillebotte’s *Man at His Bath* (1884) might not seem likely to have been the centerpiece of the Impressionist’s traveling retrospective, “Painting Men,” which

opened at the Musée d'Orsay this fall. The painting, depicting a nude man viewed from behind as he towels off, is one of the more modest works on view in the exhibition. But the aim of this show is to reexamine the artist's work by taking stock of his singular focus on masculine subjects, from laborers and soldiers to bourgeois bachelors in all-male spaces. *Man at His Bath* then serves as the optimal example to reevaluate Caillebotte and how his work subverted traditional conceptions of masculinity and gender norms. Some scholars have gone so far as to posit that the painting offers proof of his suppressed sexuality; the exhibition however offers no definitive interpretation, instead emphasizing the modernity in his work. With *Man at His Bath*, that approach reaches its peak, presenting the male body as a subject of intense scrutiny and artistry. —*Daniel Cassidy*

12 Joshua Serafin, *VOID*, 2022–



Joshua Serafin's *VOID* (2022–), as seen at the Venice Biennale.

Photo : Photo Andrea Avezzù/Courtesy La Biennale di Venezia

Just one work in this year's Venice Biennale made the leap from art world fame to social media virality: Joshua Serafin's *VOID*, a beguiling video installation featuring footage of the artist writhing around in oil-like liquid. With this performance, Serafin sought to envision the birth of a new deity. The artist lit the performance—which has been staged live at various institutions, including Amant in Brooklyn this year—in a haunting shade of blue, lending the piece an ethereal quality that befit its subject matter.

Perhaps it is no surprise that *VOID* became the subject of hit tweets and meme-ified Instagrams: the piece is effortlessly and unabashedly weird, with a mostly nude Serafin fiercely whipping their long hair around, sending sheets of black goo flying. But beyond succeeding as spectacle, *VOID* also epitomizes how many young artists—including some others in the Biennale—are envisioning beings unbound by earthly conceptions of gender and sexuality. In so doing, Serafin and these artists channel other realms with the hope of altering our own. —Alex Greenberger

11 Jeannette Ehlers, *We're Magic. We're Real #2*, 2020/2024



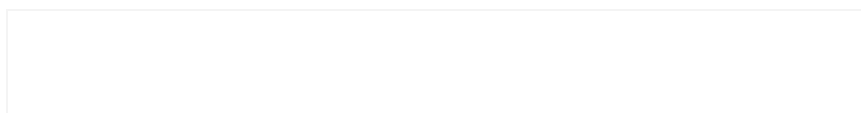
Jeannette Ehlers, *We're Magic. We're Real #2*, 2020/2024.

Photo : Courtesy Prospect New Orleans

For this year's Prospect.6 triennial, Jeannette Ehlers created this room-size installation in a corner of the Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans. Hanging at the room's center is a massive disco ball made of synthetic Afro hair in shades varying from black to light brown. While this slowly rotating orb doesn't catch the light as a mirrored disco ball might, the gold emergency blankets lining floor and walls made the space shine.

The Danish artist created this work as part of a larger series examining the role of her home country in the transatlantic slave trade. With this installation, she alludes to how natural hair has long been considered a form of freedom in Black liberation movements. Here, not only is hair a symbol of liberation and resistance, but also of joy and beauty. Accompanying the piece is wall text that reads DON'T TOUCH MY HAIR. —*Maximiliano Durón*

10 Arvida Byström, *In the Clouds*, 2024





From Arvida Byström's series "In the Clouds," 2024.

Photo : Courtesy Arvida Byström

With her book *In the Clouds*, Arvida Byström sidesteps the doom and gloom surrounding artificial intelligence and shows instead just how boring and unoriginal it can be. Byström used a “nudify” app, which allows users to feed images to an AI that responds with a nude version of the person pictured (some apps do only female anatomies.) The app responded with pictures of Byström with enlarged breasts and clean-shaven legs, aggregating the lowest common denominator of male fantasies.

Some feminist science fiction writers have envisioned tools like AI as gender enders, hoping the tool might make our own bodies become reconfigurable and customizable, rendering gender binaries obsolete. But Byström shows us that in many ways, the opposite is proving true. Gender norms are proving stubborn in the virtual realm, AI trained as it is on gargantuan quantities of porn. Her intervention makes us see how strange and stupid this all is. She tricks the AI into defying the laws of anatomy—a pink unitard is rendered contiguous with her vulva, for example—yet it still offers idealized feminine figures that are totally dehumanized, even anatomically impossible, just as it was trained to do. —*Emily Watlington*

9 **Mati Diop, *Dahomey*, 2024**



Still from Mati Diop's *Dahomey*, 2024.

Photo : Courtesy Mubi

The repatriation of cultural artifacts looted by European colonizers tends to be discussed as a reclamation of history torn away from nations in the Global South. But the joy of Mati Diop's documentary *Dahomey* is that it focuses less on the past than the future. One could say the film's subject is the 26 artifacts France sent back to Benin; at the same time, this is a towering work about how new generations may view these age-old objects in the years to come. Distanced by time, space, and colonialism, will the 21st-century Béninois population even completely relate to these artifacts? Diop offers no single answer, coding much of the

ever completely relate to these artworks: Diop offers no single answer, leaving much of the film to a lengthy discourse on the subject by university students in Cotonou who debate passionately, bitterly, fiercely. Their conversations—and Diop’s film—invite future talks on repatriation. —*Alex Greenberger*

8 **Mataaho Collective, *Takapau*, 2022**



Photo : Courtesy Venice Biennale

At the entry to the Arsenale, the Mataaho Collective's looming installation *Takapau* (2022) marked a passage into this year's Venice Biennale in more ways than one. Comprising silver truck straps woven into a sort of enveloping Minimalist monolith, the work by four Māori women from New Zealand ushered viewers into the main exhibition, which focused largely on how communities beyond the West have prospered amid the threat of violence. The piece's title referred to woven mats used in Māori wedding and childbirth rituals.

Shadows cast by the woven tiedowns appeared to be as material as the straps themselves, and the scale of the Golden Lion-winning work—climbing to the ceiling of a hulking brick building and zigzagging around columns that seemed both up to their structural task and in need of a breather after centuries of wear—made it feel limitless in how it spread out and pulled tight. —*Andy Battaglia*

7 **Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio, *Paloma Blanca Deja Volar/White Dove Let Us Fly*, 2024**



Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio, *Paloma Blanca Deja Volar/White Dove Let Us Fly*, 2024.

Photo : Courtesy Whitney Museum

Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio has used amber in past works, but he has never employed such material so ambitiously as he did in this installation for the Whitney Biennial. The hulking slab of modified amber—actually, pine resin in this case—stood within a metal armature before floor-to-ceiling windows on the Whitney’s sixth floor. The resin itself encased volcanic stones, pigeon wings, found objects, and a multitude of documents relating to the activism of white Angelenos during the 1980s and ’90s promoting justice in Central America, particularly against the civil war in El Salvador. The piece, like many others by the artist, was steeped in his family history: Aparicio’s father fled El Salvador during the civil war there, not long after his daughter was disappeared; Aparicio’s mother was concurrently politically active in LA.

By the time of the exhibition’s preview, the material had begun to drip owing to the intense sunlight pouring in from the nearby windows. Within a couple weeks, the block of amber collapsed altogether. Left susceptible to the heat and light, the resin degraded, and finally released what it held, making this piece an apt metaphor for the state of the world these days.—*Maximiliano Durón*

6 The Ruins of Baalbek



The ancient ruins of Baalbek reportedly survived air strikes.

Photo : Photo Ed Ram/Getty Images

This past September, Israel's war in Gaza expanded to Lebanon, bringing with it fears for Lebanon's already-embattled civilian infrastructure and fragile world heritage. Within a month, the latter fear would be codified in a photograph of a dark plume of smoke rising from behind the ancient Roman ruins in Baalbek, a historic city in Lebanon. An Israeli air strike had landed less than a mile away.

Eleven thousand years old and inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List since 1984, the triad of Roman temples in Baalbek are among the best-preserved artifacts of Imperial Roman architecture. The temples are dedicated to the Roman deities Jupiter, Venus, and Mercury, and were constructed over the course of more than two centuries. They have served in the many millennia since as sites of worship and refuge, and more recently, venues for music and dance. Whether they will endure another year is no certainty.

Lebanese cultural authorities appealed to the international community for intervention on their behalf, as well as for the sake of the wealth of world heritage scattered across the country. Following negotiations, Israel approved a ceasefire deal with Hezbollah November 26; however, both sides have since accused the other of violating the agreement. —*Tessa Solomon*

5

Dana Awartani, *Come, let me heal your wounds. Let me mend your broken bones as we stand here mourning, 2024*



Dana Awartani, *Come, let me heal your wounds. Let me mend your broken bones as we stand here mourning, 2024.*

Photo : Marco Zorzanello/Courtesy Venice Biennale

For this year's Venice Biennale, Dana Awartani, a Saudi artist of Palestinian descent, continued to expand her 2024 installation *Come, let me heal your wounds. Let me mend your broken bones*. The installation, first presented in 2019, comprises yards of naturally dyed silk with hundreds of strategically ripped holes. The vibrant fabrics were produced in Kerala, India, using some 50 herbs and spices, all with specific cultural references, to dye them. Awartani then carefully darned the holes marking the historical and cultural sites in seven Arab nations destroyed by wars and acts of terror, as well as the ongoing devastation

in Gaza. The installation combines a “borderless representation of annihilated cultural heritage,” the power of healing plants, and the careful work involved in repairing damaged objects. In a year that has often felt hopeless, Awartani’s work signals that repair is both possible and necessary, without shying away from the horrific violence that caused the damage. —*Karen K. Ho*

4 **Frieda Toranzo Jaeger, *Rage is a machine in times of senselessness*, 2024**



Frieda Toranzo Jaeger, *Rage is a machine in times of senselessness*, 2024.

Photo : Courtesy Venice Biennale

Marginalized perspectives—those of artists from the Global South, with Indigenous knowledge, and who make feminized crafts—were everywhere in this Venice Biennale. But with this piece, Frieda Toranzo Jaeger offered a healthy dose of skepticism about all that inclusivity, questioning this savior complex attitude that still positions a Western construct like the Biennale as some pinnacle of culture. In this multi-panel painting, as in many of her others, Toranzo Jaeger took up the conventions of European painting—polyptychs, figuration—but executed them badly. Then, she hired family members trained in Indigenous embroidery techniques to run their threads directly through her canvas, a way of “inserting an Indigenous tradition into a Western one,” as she put it **in an interview** (<https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/interviews/frieda-toranzo-jaeger-interview-1234596828/>).

Working at a larger scale than ever before, Toranzo Jaeger painted an idyllic landscape punctuated by lesbian orgies and surrounded by images of futuristic machinery woven with bondage-like ribbons and grommets. There was a version of Frida Kahlo’s 1954 painting *Viva la Vida*, a still life featuring a spread of cut-up watermelons, and a watermelon of Toranzo Jaeger’s own alongside text reading VIVA PALESTINA! Trite critics of late are asking if painting and politics really belong together. Toranzo Jaeger reminds us that the two are historically intertwined: the medium is a Western construct that Europeans reified, then contorted to justify white supremacy, as if other cultures without painting-filled museums were inherently lesser. —*Emily Watlington*

3 **Shahzia Sikander, *Witness*, 2023**



Shahzia Sikander's *Witness* (2023) was beheaded in July after anti-abortion groups denounced it.

Photo : Courtesy University of Houston

Shahzia Sikander's *Witness* shows a woman with horns or hornlike braids curling out of her head and multiple serpentine limbs where normally there are arms. Conceived as a monument to women and justice, the 18-foot-tall sculpture was commissioned by the Madison Square Park Conservancy in 2023 and moved to Texas earlier this year, where it was installed on the University of Houston campus. Almost immediately it became the focal point of controversy for anti-abortion activists who deemed it a “satanic” tribute to abortion and Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. During a hurricane over the summer, the sculpture was beheaded, with officials saying the act was intentional. Following the attack, Sikander wrote in a *Washington Post* op-ed that she wouldn't attempt to repair the sculpture. “I want to leave it beheaded, for all to see. The work is now a witness to the fissures in our country.” —*Daniel Cassidy*

Demian DinéYazhi', we must stop imagining apocalypse/genocide + we must

imagine liberation, 2024

Demian DinéYazhi', *we must stop imagining apocalypse/genocide + we must imagine liberation, 2024.*

Photo : Courtesy Whitney Museum

The Whitney Biennial was arguably less controversial this year than it has been in others, and this time around, that's why it *was* so controversial—critics at mainstream publications complained that the participating artists had played it too safe. But only those who refused to engage deeply with the works on view would perceive a lack of confrontation, and this sculpture stands as proof.

The piece by Demian DinéYazhi' spelled out its titular phrase in red lights that blinked on and off, certain words and letters going dark seemingly at random. The piece's politics appeared to have been laid bare and made totally obvious, but the work turned out to contain a secret: the sculpture at various points flashed the phrase free palestine, something that was unknown even to the Whitney until the *New York Times* reported on it. Hardly the most formally complex work in the Biennial, this piece best exemplified a

certain tendency much in evidence right now, not just in this exhibition but across the world more broadly. Rather than making plain that it was about Israel's war in Gaza, DinéYazhi' left it for viewers to figure out, quietly lacing their commentary into a work that was easily mistaken as staid activism. It would take some effort to read between the lines of this work and miss its provocation. —*Alex Greenberger*

1 Archie Moore, *kith and kin*, 2024



Archie Moore, *kith and kin*, 2024, Australia Pavilion at Venice Biennale 2024, installation view.

Photo : Photo Andrea Rossetti/©Archie Moore/Courtesy the artist and The Commercial; Commissioned by Creative Australia

Upon entering the Australian Pavilion at this year's Venice Biennale, one confronted the silence and stillness of this installation. Cast in dim lighting along the pavilion's walls was a

sprawling family tree in chalk created by Archie Moore, an artist of Kamilaroi and Bigambul descent on his mother's side, and British and Scottish on his father's, that went back some 2,400 generations, or 65,000 years. It shows survival, despite all the horrible things that happened. We're still here and continuing our cultural practices," **Moore told ARTnews (<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/artists/archie-moore-australian-pavilion-preview-2024-venice-biennale-1234702929/>)**.

One section was intentionally rubbed out, Moore holding the space for those ancestors lost to history, whose memories can never be recovered. At the room's center was a shallow black memorial pool over which hovered a table filled with carefully stacked coroners' inquest reports on the death of First Nations people while in police custody in Australia. All the writing in the display was wholly unintelligible, and that was Moore's point. Confronting such vast documentation of all the violence perpetrated against First Nations peoples overwhelms to the point of numbness. No wonder this powerful pavilion took the Biennale's Golden Lion. —*Maximiliano Durón*



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