

ARTFORUM

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TOP TEN The Best of 2023

By Sook-Kyung Lee



Sook-Kyung Lee is the director of the Whitworth, the University of Manchester, UK; the artistic director of the 14th Gwangju Biennale; and the curator of the Japan Pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale, opening in April 2024.

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01

CARRIE MAE WEEMS (BARBICAN ART GALLERY, LONDON; COCURRED BY RAÚL MUÑOZ DE LA VEGA AND FLORENCE OSTENDE)



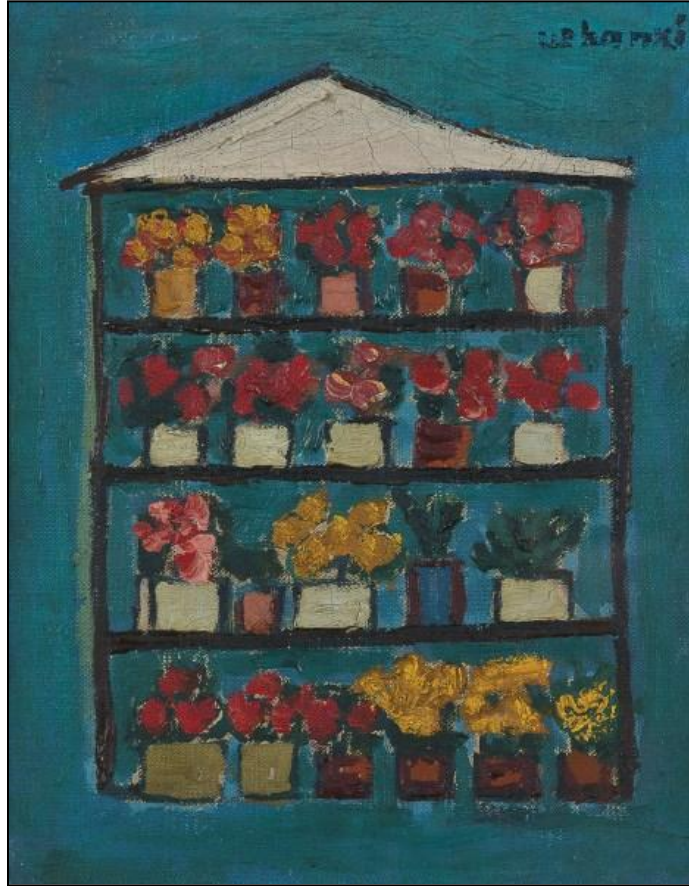
Carrie Mae Weems, *It's Over—A Diorama*, 2021, mixed media. Installation view, Barbican, London, 2023. Photo: Max Colson.

Organizing the somewhat challenging architecture of the Barbican Art Gallery into continuous yet autonomous rooms, “Carrie Mae Weems: Reflections for Now” showcased the artist’s multidisciplinary practice at its best. Weems has questioned the seeming normalization of injustices—across lines of race, gender, class, systems of representation, and power structures—in artistic and social realms throughout her career. This survey presented a timely overview of her dignified resistance to the wrongs of the world.

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02

KIM WHANKI (HOAM ART MUSEUM, SOUTH KOREA; CURATED BY HYUNSUN TAE)



Kim Whanki, *Flower Shop*, 1948, oil on canvas, 10 3/4 × 8 3/8".

Kim has become a household name in Korea over the past decade, with his paintings breaking multiple auction records, but his forty-year practice has rarely been presented as a consistent and rigorous body of work. As the inaugural exhibition of the refurbished Hoam Art Museum, “a dot, a sky_kim whanki” offered a much-needed summary of Kim’s oeuvre, including paintings, works on paper, and a trove of archival materials. From the artist’s studies in Japan as a then-colonial subject to the periods he spent in Paris and New York, his contact with international art scenes was here viewed through the lens of personal experience as well as that of broader artistic developments in those places.

03

HILMA AF KLINT AND PIET MONDRIAN (TATE MODERN, LONDON; CURATED BY FRANCES MORRIS, NABILA ABDEL NABI, BRIONY FER, LAURA STAMPS, AND AMRITA DHALLU)

Although af Klint and Mondrian never met, their shared interest in nature and abstract visual language enables a juxtaposition that intricately binds each artist’s position within the twentieth-century canon. Having successfully established a model of encounter via which to rethink conventional art-historical narratives, the collective curatorial direction for this exhibition proved to be instrumental in reinterpreting

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Mondrian through perspectives beyond modernism, while raising awareness of af Klint's significance in the wider trajectory of abstract art.

04

SEUNG-TAEK LEE (CANAL PROJECTS, NEW YORK)



Seung-taek Lee, *Wind-Folk Amusement*, 1971. Performance view, Pier 45, Hudson River Park, New York, February 25, 2023. Canal Projects led by Ayoung Yu and Nicholas Oh. Photo: Ginevra Shay.

Recent years have seen a resurgence in interest in the trailblazing practice of this master of the Korean avant-garde. “Seung-taek Lee: Things Unstable” reflected on his body of multidisciplinary work, with a focus on environmental themes that resonate strongly with the present moment. Reenactments by younger artists of two of Lee’s most renowned performances, *Wind-Folk Amusement*, 1971, and *Earth Performance*, 1989–96, struck a particularly poignant note, manifesting the rich potential for intergenerational exchange.

05

CARNEGIE INTERNATIONAL (CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART, PITTSBURGH; CURATED BY SOHRAB MOHEBBI AND RYAN INOUYE)



View of 58th Carnegie International, 2023, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. From left: Mohammed Sami, *The Fountain I*, 2021; Mohammed Sami, *Abu Ghraib*, 2022. Photo: Sean Eaton.

The Fifty-Eighth Carnegie International set out with the ambitious aim of mapping the ongoing impact of the United States on the rest of the world since 1945, but its curatorial approach was decidedly antimonumental and highly individualized. Titled “is it morning for you yet?,” in a nod to the Mayan Kaqchikel expression for “good morning,” the exhibition highlighted several lesser-known, underrepresented artists from around the globe (among them Soun-Gui Kim and Truong Cong Tung) to address persistent issues of power imbalance. The series of historical capsule exhibitions, like the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende Collection, were well-researched and laudably collaborative with locally rooted institutions.



View of “Zadie Xa: House Gods, Animal Guides and Five Ways 2 Forgiveness,” 2022–23, Whitechapel Gallery, London. Photo: Andy Keate.

Drawing on her personal and cultural background, Xa’s work traces diasporic identities, folklore, and global movements of people and their memories. Titled “House Gods, Animal Guides and Five Ways 2 Forgiveness,” Xa’s exhibition presented a new body of work inspired by Korean mythologies and storytelling. Set in and around a “house” resembling a small traditional Korean *hanok* but made of fabric, her installation consisted of paintings, sculptures, and textiles. Within these works, humans mingle with animals, monsters, and ghosts in ancient forests, suggesting a hybrid, matriarchal world.

07

SHINRO OHTAKE (NATIONAL MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, TOKYO; CURATED BY HAJIME NARIAI)



View of “Shinro Ohtake,” 2023, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. From left: *Retina (Left Eye)*, 1990–91; *Retina (Right Eye)*, 1990–91; *Memphis #2*, 1989. Photo: Kioku Keizo.

Ohtake’s marshaling of truly diverse materials, styles, colors, and forms across genres has distinguished him as one of Japan’s most resourceful contemporary artists. The retrospective brought together roughly five hundred works from his forty-year practice, from photographs, picture books, and prints to paintings, assemblage, and large installations. Sensual and psychological overload consistently figured throughout the exhibition, but it seemed a genuine reflection of Ohtake’s unique creative energy: restless, inquisitive, and all-encompassing.

ÉDGAR CALEL'S RITUAL *PA RU TUN CHE'* (ANAHUACALLI MUSEUM, MEXICO CITY)

Édgar Calel, *Pa Ru Tun Che'*, 2023. Performance view, Museo Anahuacalli, Mexico City, November 10, 2023.

Calel's participation in recent exhibitions in places as far-flung as Gwangju, Pittsburgh, and Liverpool attests to the international recognition of his work, which foregrounds ancestral knowledge. He holds rituals, not performances, to initiate his installations, honoring and thanking his ancestors who blessed and enabled his work. As part of the symposium "Unlearning the Modern: Art and Indigeneity in Latin America," Calel hosted *Pa Ru Tun Che'* at the Anahuacalli Museum, inviting several artists from different parts of the region to join him in celebration of their collective lineage and in creating an exceptionally moving homage.

09

MARTIN WONG (CAMDEN ART CENTRE, LONDON; CURATED BY KRIST GRUIJTHUIJSEN AND AGUSTÍN PÉREZ RUBIO)



Martin Wong, *Prison Bunk Beds* (detail), ca. 1988–91, acrylic on canvas, 60 × 48".

A key figure of American counterculture from the 1970s to the '90s, Wong merged the visual languages of urban poetry, graffiti, queer aesthetics, and Chinese iconography. "Martin Wong Malicious Mischief" was the first comprehensive survey of the artist's work outside the United States. In addition to London, it toured multiple European cities, including Berlin, Madrid, and Amsterdam. The survey drew upon Wong's identity, exploring aspects of his race and sexuality to provide a better appreciation of the acute political undercurrents within heavily coded paintings like *My Secret World*, 1978–81.

Organized by KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, with Museo Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, Móstoles, Spain, and the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, where it is on view through April 1, 2024.

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ALFREDO JAAR (SCAI PIRAMIDE, TOKYO)

Alfredo Jaar, *Silent Flash*, 2023, light box, vinyl mounted on Plexiglas, 6 3/4 × 120 × 2 1/2".

As the recipient of the eleventh Hiroshima Prize, Jaar produced "The End," a solo exhibition at the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art that ran concurrently with his retrospective at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago, Chile. The exhibition in Japan offered a chance to experience Jaar's continuing critique of cultural and political crises in his typically minimalist language in an intimate environment, while also featuring his new collaboration with photographer Daido Moriyama. Imagining the aftermath of a potential apocalypse, the show included *Silent Flash*, 2023, a selection of aerial views of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial as if seen through the eye of an atomic bomb. It was the defining work of this considered exhibition.