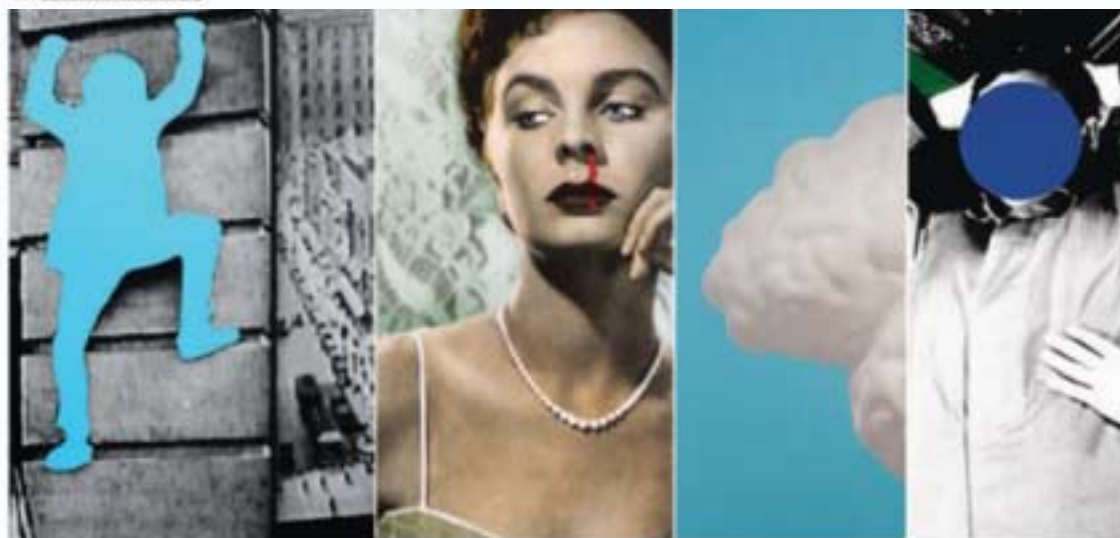


The 10 Best Exhibitions of 2010, and the 3 Worst

by [Paddy Johnson](#)



1. [John Baldessari: Pure Beauty](#) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Is John Baldessari the most important artist of his generation? His ginormous traveling retrospective, currently on view at The Met, suggests he might be, highlighting a massive body of work that reflects both a curator's dream and the contemporary condition. These days, we're all participating in the sorting of images, which is why the half-century Baldessari has spent examining why we like the pictures we do is so valuable. This takes different forms of course, from a series of photographs in which the artist chooses carrots he likes, to a grid of self-portraits in which he sports different haircuts and facial hair. Mostly this show makes number one on my list though because of the sheer volume of work that resembles an unusual stock image search. Somehow there seems very little that is as relevant to contemporary artists as Google image search.

2. [The 2010 Whitney Biennial](#) at the Whitney Museum

No giant survey show is perfect, but this iteration of the Biennial was as good as it gets. As I wrote at the time, a lot of this is luck; it's not like there's a selection criteria here past what's been good over the last two years—but so what? The exhibition was restrained enough that viewers could absorb everything they looked at. There were only 55 artists this year, as opposed to 81 in 2008. Curators Francesco Bonami and Gary Carrion-Murayari also arranged the show so that works requiring longer viewing times were grouped together, which is greatly respectful to viewers' needs. Highlights from this Biennial included Nina Berman's war vet photographs, Sharon Hayes' video installation and Sarah Crowner's black and white zigzag paintings.

3. [Trisha Donnelly](#) at Casey Kaplan Gallery

I knew this exhibition was great the minute I saw it, but I've since had a hard time articulating why it worked. Perhaps this is the way it should be; the exhibition of carved slabs of stone in various sizes seems largely the result of an intuitive art-making process, which is typically hard to discuss. Something about the mixture of fossil-like carvings of gears or speaker-esque slits simply resonated for me when I visited, and there's no other way to describe it. The greatest moment in the exhibition was discovering a small pool of water inside a trough carved into a large, flat stone. It's hard to imagine anything more erotic.

4. [Katherine Bernhardt: Tombouctou 52 Jours](#) at Canada

Katherine Bernhardt is a master of the dashed-off painting. Many of her large wall-sized works are made in a little over half an hour, which is no small feat. For this exhibition Bernhardt took to covering the gallery walls using an airbrush and skin-tone paint. Then she covered the surface with animal fur-like patterns. The paintings themselves resembled rugs and, like most of her work, were drawn from magazines. The result was a series of rooms that resembled a human body made to display ornaments.

5. Mark Barrow at Elizabeth Dee Gallery

Using handmade textile woven by his wife, Sarah Parker, Mark Barrow coats his paintings with translucent primer before carefully dotting the raised portions of the fabric with color. The works themselves are geometric and abstract; those that least resemble quilts generally achieve greater success. This solo exhibition was his first at Elizabeth Dee, and a remarkable one at that.

6. Rhizome's Seven on Seven at The New Museum

Organized by Lauren Cornell, this all-star event pairing seven successful technologists with seven well-known artists could have been a total failure. Cornell gave teams 24 hours to come up with an idea and present it (a formula that resembles a reality show challenge more than it does an art studio). And yet the conference was a complete success, proving that thoughtful pairings and good work environments produce excellent results. So too does the decision to eliminate the art, and focus on creating better art-making tools. These results weren't only due to Cornell's direction, but also because the artists and technologists took practical approaches to the conference. It worked!

7. R.H. Quaytman at The ICA in Boston

I know this exhibition was outside New York, but R.H. Quaytman's show at the ICA Boston gets a nod anyway, as she's New York-based and I missed her 2009 show at Miguel Abreu Gallery. The work was simply outstanding. Responding specifically to the history of the museum, Quaytman's pink and gray gradations throbbled. They brought together multiple perspectives through text, visual illusion and special arrangement. It was overwhelming.

8. Dump.fm IRL at 319 Scholes

What happens when the 4chan of the art world is given an exhibition in real life? The image chat room cleans up a little for their opening. This meant members posted significantly fewer erect cocks and extreme food images (buffet tables filled with hamburgers, cheese covered nachos, etc.), knowing their chats were being projected live onto a wall at a gallery opening. Curator Lindsay Howard selected other work, either inspired by the site or made by its users. The collective picture formed was that of a unique community of makers, each using a lexicon of stock images, internet slang and animated gifs. This is the new art we've been waiting to see for the last 30 years.

9. Becket Bowes, Failure Cannon at Rachel Uffner Gallery

Oh, what a conundrum. How did Becket Bowes' *Failure Cannon*, an exhibition about the inevitable failure of communication, impart its message so well that it ended up on my top 10 list? It was the droopy observation couch with only half its legs that did it for me. It gave a clear view of the crooked, hanging, photo-realist paintings depicting textbook pages, while simultaneously seating viewers close to the ground. The absurdity of sitting on a fallen couch to watch fallen paintings brings me great pleasure just in its remembrance.

10. Anne Collier at Anton Kern

Anne Collier shot a photograph of an eye in a developing tray that had a corner resembling a tear duct. Can the photographic process reproduce how the body sees? It's a philosophical question more than it is scientific, and Collier provided a series of photographs commenting on emotional, bodily and mechanical sight as a means of exploring the topic. The result was an exhibition I've returned to, even in reproduction, countless times since its month-long run at Anton Kern last January.

...And the Worst

1. Tino Sehgal at The Guggenheim

Talk about an over-rated exhibition! Tino Sehgal had visitors escorted by docents of ascending ages up a ramp while discussing "progress." By the time visitors reached the top of the Guggenheim they were usually talking about nothing. A facile concept accompanied by mindless media hype.

2. Skin Fruit at The New Museum

Nobody liked this show because it wasn't any good. The only organizing concept was that the works all came from the collection of Dakis Joannou, and appealed to artist Jeff Koons, who curated. This is a step up from The Rubell Family Collection exhibition in Miami this year, which conflated shopping and personal growth, but that's about the extent of it. I pray I never have to discuss *Skin Fruit* again.

3. Dan Colen: Poetry at Gagosian

Dan Colen's *Poetry* this fall at Gagosian was about as vacuous as exhibitions come. Bubble gum paintings, an inverted skate ramp, a row of fallen motorcycles; it was lot of subculture and no reflection. Time to grow up.