

New York Magazine

The Year in Culture

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6.

At the Whitney's Rudolf Stingel exhibit.

(Photo: Sheldon C. Collins/Courtesy of the Whitney)

BEST SEQUEL

Performa 07

Two years ago, the critic and historian RoseLee Goldberg—working with a tiny staff and almost no money—invented her own performance-art biennial, staged all over town for seventeen days. This fall, over 25 days and 95 events, she pulled off another hit. Among its many extraordinary performances: Nathalie Djurberg created a live soundtrack for her Claymation snuff film; Aïda Ruilova combined dance and magic; Adam Pendleton preached about being queer in front of a full gospel choir; and Tamy Ben-Tor, the shape-shifting demon mistress of personality disorder and chaos, transformed herself into a dwarf rabbi before a stunned audience. (About its misfires—the ludicrously overhyped Francesco Vezzoli performance starring celebrities like Cate Blanchett and Natalie Portman—well, it's performance art, and it doesn't hang around if you don't want it to.)

7. BEST REDISCOVERIES

“High Times/ Hard Times”

This show of abstract paintings by painters who were born too late for Pop or hard-core Minimalism—and most of whom are nearly forgotten—was uneven and incomplete. Yet it was a fantastically necessary and instructive exhibition, thought up and staged at the National Academy by artist David Reed and critic Katy Siegel. When these artists came of age, the bright lights and big-city images of Pop were dominant, along with the clean machine-made forms of Minimalism; Conceptualism was the new kid on the block, the object was dematerializing, and painting was being pronounced dead. These painters picked up the pieces, cobbled them together, and were passionately dedicated to abstraction. Artists today are still finding strains that they practiced useful. That this exhibition was staged in a so-called peripheral institution only made you understand that other, larger museums should be in the same game.

8. FRESHEST CENTURY-OLD PAINTING

Les Demoiselles d'Avignon at 100

Picasso's insurrectionary shot across the world's bow was completed a century ago this past summer, and *Demoiselles* is proof that it can take 100 years to look at a picture. The painting of five whores in a bordello still shoots sparks. Critic Leo Steinberg said it was "a tidal wave of female aggression." Once ridiculed as the end of art, this painting changed the world when it was shown for just fifteen days in 1916. (It then stayed out of view until 1939, by which time MoMA had bought it for \$28,000.) So much still comes out of this one painting: the shattering of space, the fragmentation of figuration, the dislocations of form, the simultaneous coexistence of conflicting styles within a single work of art, the urge to make transgressive objects, and the desire to go beyond the status quo while also plugging back into some of art's most ancient and revered traditions. We'll be marking its 200th birthday with just as much respect in 2107.



Morton Bartlett's *Girl With Fur Collar*.

(Photo: Morton Bartlett/Courtesy of Julie Saul Gallery)

9. BEST GALLERY SHOW (MAD GENIUS DIVISION)

Morton Bartlett at the Julie Saul Gallery

Whether you think of this outsider photographer (1903–1992) as a real-life Humbert Humbert, an inspired Gepetto, the Henry Darger of photography, or just a pervert who photographed the anatomically correct dolls he fashioned of young girls, it was thrilling to see this gallery show of rediscovered color images by a great self-taught artist. These new pictures, which came to light only recently, are more vivid and new-looking than anything we've seen by Bartlett so far. Yet the subjects were familiar: flashes of panties, pouting misses, and Shirley Temple–like moppets. His

perfect dolls, meticulous handmade clothes, and fetishistic scenery pave the way to a broad swath of contemporary photographers like Jeff Wall, Laurie Simmons, and Gregory Crewdson. Bartlett's art is proof that the label "self-taught artist" is as limiting and redundant as ever; all artists are self-taught in some sense of the word.

10. BEST NEW SCENE

The Lower East Side Gallery District

Just when it seemed like Manhattan real-estate prices had made it impossible for art galleries to cluster in another neighborhood, the Lower East Side has emerged as a real and non-annoying place for looking at art. There are only around 30 galleries, spread out, meaning you have to take a breather as you walk between shows. The neighborhood is mixed-up and interesting; the spaces are small and intimate and call to mind the DIY early East Village. Galleries aren't better because they're here or worse because they're in Chelsea—and in a few years, the Lower East Side may be saturated. For now, however, it's lovely.=

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obviously, the person who wrote in response to the Matthew Barney show didn't read the bit about an artist who was trying to figure something out. Art is a process not a piece. ...

BY [LULUJP13](#) May 18, 2008, 6:28:41 PM EDT

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