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TOP TEN

## The Year in Visual Art



MICHAEL NORTHROP

Laure Drogoul

Posted 12/9/2009

**The past 12 months** really delivered a blow to the arts--you know, the stuff and ideas that comes from that creative part of the mammalian brain that, in part, is what makes us human--hitting them squarely on the chin. And the ribs. And the nose. And occasionally even a knee to the groin. Funding? Really, really down. Cutbacks and/or layoffs and/or furloughs at major institutions? Yes. Long-term survival? Perhaps in peril.

The thing is, even when American art world times were ostensibly flush, Baltimore--from the Baltimore Museum of Art to the MICA undergrads improvising an exhibition space in an inexpensive studio--was lean. Local artists have been doing more with less since before the BFA graduating class of 2009 was born. No money, no problem--they'll find a way.

Which is not to imply that local artists *want* to try and thrive in this state, just that they don't stop making the effort. So support the arts: You're not just investing in artists, you're putting a down payment on the overall well being of this city we call home.

◀ MAR | APR | MAY ▶

Date selected

19

Showing events from April 19. [Click for more.](#)

### Thinks Past

A retrospective of prints and works on paper by D. L. Simmons. (opening reception with live music 6-10 p.m. April 1) Simmons produces large scale prints (24"x 36" and larger) using multiple processes. His work begins with a photograph with deep personal significance. Recently, he has been working with images that his grandfather took of the Baltimore Harbor during his deployment in World War II. He layers each image with lithography, intaglio, serigraphy, photo transfer, and digital imaging.

### A Grand Legacy: Five Centuries of European Art

Features Rinaldo and Armida and paintings by Sir Anthony van Dyck, Frans Hals, Rembrandt van Rijn, and Jean Baptiste Siméon Chardin.

**Rob Zuzin**

### THE YEAR IN NEWS Our mayor was indicted Top Ten 2009

and convicted of embezzlement this year. We learned just how deeply a violen... I By Edward Ericson Jr., Van Smith, and Erin Sullivan

**THE YEAR IN MOVIES** No, you're not hallucinating. *Revanche*, an Austrian crime flick that starts off in somewhat grim qu...

**THE YEAR IN TELEVISION** Raise your hand if you still have cable. As in, that overpriced digital teat that pipes into your h...

**THE YEAR IN MUSIC** We do this because, between the 15 or so of us, we listen to a lot of music, we think a lot about m...

**THE YEAR IN LOCAL MUSIC** The thing that unites Baltimore music is Baltimore the city, a geographic place with a good number ...

**THE YEAR IN BOOKS** No idea why there's such a strong turnout of speculative/sci-fi-ish titles in this year's Top 10. P...

**THE YEAR ON STAGE** Local stage talent might be the last untapped well of local greatness. Local music is already an an...

### 1 Laure Drogoul: *Follies, Predicaments and Other Conundrums* (Maryland Institute College of Art)

Everyone agrees: This rollicking, flamboyant, and sprawling exhibition stole our art hearts. Laure Drogoul is one of Baltimore's treasures and MICA's Exhibition Design class spent a year polishing up a 25-year career into a brilliant and astounding masterpiece. Drogoul is an artist whose sculpture and performances defy all expectations, simultaneously tickling and challenging her audience, swaddling us in fuzzy pinkness and then splaying out our darkest fears, point blank. From the "She Pod of Rotten Enchantment" to the "Workshop of Filthy Creation," Drogoul enveloped us in her world, and then gently nudged us to take a

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States, celebrating the individual narratives of each one, from their cultural and generational perspective. The exhibition illustrated thematic similarities and distinctions explored by the artists, ranging in age from 30 to more than 90, and their works explored stereotypes, customs, and unique cultural phenomena. *Didn't Care* positioned these wide-ranging pieces as part of a larger dialogue about using art to express one's heritage, gender, and identity. (Alex Ebstein)

### 3 *Abandon Ship* (Current Gallery)

The Current Gallery's legacy on Calvert Street ended with the memorable, but bittersweet *Abandon Ship*. Curated on an invite and proposal basis, the show included Current veterans such as Gary Kachadourian, Andrew Liang, and Audrey Collins Petrich, (among others), and continued its outreach to Baltimore's young artists even as its doors closed. The exhibition, which was meant to be destroyed in the building's demolition, encouraged proposals that used the structure itself, such as a collaborative papier-mâché installation of tentacle-like forms bursting through the dropped ceiling, wall paintings, and Kachadourian's wheat-pasted drawings. Embracing its relocation and inevitable hiatus with a good sense of humor, Current's last show stayed true to its light-heartedness and DIY roots, but with an appropriately poignant undertone. (AE)

### 4 *Protocol: Syntax/Semantics* (Gallery Four)

The oft art blog-quoted press release for this Artscape satellite-qua-H&Hscape exhibition threatened something about its four artists who "compile objects from material culture to invent a stunning new vernacular, which sometimes compliments and also contradicts their original meaning." No idea why that retreat to such straitjacketed language when Shaun Flynn, Brian Randolph, Hadieh Shafie, and Dan Steinhilber are, quite simply, witty visual minds who make shit that just looks cool. From Flynn's sheetrock hammock or reflective tape starscape installed along Falls Road to Shafie's dizzying paper scroll works and Steinhilber's ripped and repurposed plastic bags, *Protocol: Syntax/Semantics* captured what's made Gallery Four a consistently vital space: mingling playfulness with intelligence. You know you're doing something right when the lingering memory of a show is the uncanny image of a rubbish bag dancing on air. (Bret McCabe)

### 5 *Sink/Float* (Area 405)

Like so many of the factory-cum-gallery spaces around town, Area 405 sometimes feels a bit too large and rundown to show work properly. But occasionally exhibitions feed on these warehouse spaces, rather than work against it, and *Sink/Float* is the best example of this idea in 2009. From watery works such as Morgan Showalter's "Float," with a real bathtub you could lie down in, to Christian Benefiel's motion-sensitive air pump pieces, the show was full of works that could have existed in the space before the show, and could remain as ready-made objects for exhibitions to come. (Martin L. Johnson)

### 6 *Exuberant Pattern* (Towson University)

Curated by Susan Isaacs, *Exuberant Pattern* featured the work of five contemporary female artists who reference decorative sources and espouse a distinctly feminine aesthetic: Astrid Bowlby, Huguette Caland, Caroline Lathan-Stiefel, Piper Shepard, and Merle Temkin. The most successful works of the show were larger than life, as in Bowlby's "No More Twist II," which was like walking into a three-dimensional cartoon of black-and-white pattern, and Lathan-Stiefel's "Split Barrier," an overwhelming jungle gym of colored pipe cleaners, yarn, pins, plastic, and thread. An elegant counter balance, Shepard's gigantic lacy compositions in cut muslin, fabric swatches, and corsage pins were magical in their density, labor, and intricacy. (CO)

### 7 *Mixed Signals: Artists Consider Masculinity in Sports* (UMBC Center for Art and Visual Culture)

Athletes have to be some of the most represented/photographed humans around in the modern era. Whether it be in sports-media coverage, as marketing items/ product spokespersons, or just for team promotional items, male athletes and their bodies are part of the visual language of everyday life. And this traveling show, expanded by New York's Independent Curators International from a fall 2008 Los Angeles County Museum of Art exhibition curated by Christopher Bedford, explores just what such "sports" representations might mean for the male psyche, and the artists featured--especially Catherine Opie, Hank

second look at our tenuous and paradoxical existence. (Cara Ober)

## 2 *If I Didn't Care: Multigenerational Artists Discuss Cultural Histories* (Park School)

*If I Didn't Care*, an exhibition of multicultural and multigenerational female artists, included the work of 29 artists from across the United

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Willis Thomas, Sam Taylor-Wood, and ingenious Canadian Brian Jungen--curveball mine this idea of the male in the athlete. (BM)

## 8 *Decoy* (Creative Alliance at the Patterson)

*Decoy*, curated by Erin Cluley, was a group show intended as a riddle. Featuring the works of Kendra Hebel, Robert Horvath, Paul Jeanes, Michael Mansfield, Jenny Mullins, and Kimberly Ruppert, *Decoy's* success hinged on artificial constructs, assumptions, and viewpoints. My favorite pieces in the show were Hebel's three costumed "tree nymphs"; each model wore dresses that appeared to have been knitted by trees, with odd furry moles and nose hair to complete the natural visage. All the works in the show, in a variety of media and style, questioned the definition of the familiar, the beautiful, the authentic, and the illusory. (CO)

## 9 *Altered States* (Load of Fun)

Jamillah James helped to establish her curatorial acumen with this satellite exhibition to the Transmodern Festival. The short-lived *Altered States*, which wrapped around the hallway exhibition space in the second floor of the Load of Fun studios, featured a mix of local and international artists working in video, installation, and new media. True to the Transmodern aesthetic, the exhibition celebrated the ephemeral and performance facets of contemporary art over product and commercialism, helping to showcase and contextualize local artists working within that vein. Cohesive, smart, and injecting exciting work into the Baltimore art community, *Altered States* managed to make a huge impression in the single evening that it was open to the public. (AE)

## 10 *Jo Smail: Conjurations* (Goya Contemporary)

One of Baltimore's many good/bad deals for artists is that the city is lousy with creative minds and nearly bereft of sustainable commercial spaces. That's why we have so many artist-run spaces that, more frequently than not, stage idea-driven group shows that spotlight that wide berth of the visual community's labors. That fact does mean that the few solo shows spotlighting local working artists should be extremely confident, providing the leadership by example that visual art *careers* are possible. Baltimore-based Laure Drogoul's ebullient exhibition offered a much needed big picture look at a vital local force, while Jo Smail's exhibition at Goya Contemporary provided an intimate but intellectually rigorous look at a painter continuously mining her ideas. Smail's sometimes seemingly innocuous compositions complexly unpack themselves under close inspection, where her blithe gifts for the lyrical and the linguistic begin to manifest themselves in the brain. (BM)

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