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## 2012: Year in Review

Posted on 06 January 2013.



Picking the best art events of the year is always a challenge. Not this time around. Like topography in an aerial photograph, the top shows of 2012 jumped right off the page. You'll find them listed below — star-dusted and ready for replay in no particular order.

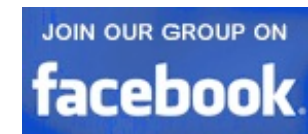
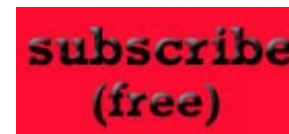
Jay De Feo @ SFMOMA & [Hosfelt](#). The quintessential beat-era artist, De Feo, who died in 1989 at age 60, captured the strength and fragility of the human enterprise as poignantly as any painter who ever lived. Stand before *The Rose* or any of a half a dozen other monumental canvases in which pigment simulates flesh, geological events or cosmic forces and you'll experience something akin to a religious conversion. No less compelling was a **companion show at Hosfelt**, which focused on the fluid relationship De Feo maintained between

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Carol Lefkowitz, Toru Sugita, and Juan Miguel Santiago

January 12 – February 21, 2013  
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Jay De Feo: "The Rose"

small B&W pictures that Sherman created while earning her MFA at SUNY. It shows Sherman in a variety of guises that foretold the many roles she would later play before the camera, proving that she had it all together from the start. The cognoscenti in Buffalo, where Sherman earned her MFA at SUNY may have known this, but it was news to me.

**Documenta, Monumenta, Manifesta.** Last summer, Mark Van Proyen delivered comprehensive reports on all three events – *all* in one post. Documenta 13, he wrote, “was a lightning rod for prolonged controversy and analysis...portending a game-changing shift between the previous five years and the next half-decade.” [Read the full story.](#)

[Radical Camera: New York Photo League @ the Contemporary Jewish Museum](#) (CJM) showed that the golden era of American street photography didn't begin in the '50s and '60s; it started with the New York Photo League, a group of mostly older photographers steeped in the radical politics of '20s and '30s. It captures American photography at a critical juncture, between what were then thought to be conflicting impulses: documentation and fine art. A lot of big names were represented. But the show's strength lay in the number of little known artists it brought to light – artists whose careers were cut short because the U.S. government infiltrated the group and rebaited all but the most fearless into tragic obscurity.

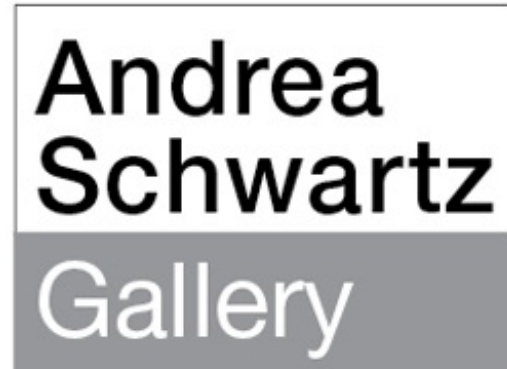


drawing, photography and painting. Watch for our upcoming, albeit late breaking, review of the SFMOMA show, up through Feb. 3.

Cindy Sherman's SFMOMA retrospective was a knockout, too. Of the many revelations, the most powerful for me was a montage of



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[Vik Muniz @ Rena Bransten](#). Muniz blurs the distinction between the real and the fake so convincingly that one wonders whether such distinctions even matter. Blending elements of Pop, Conceptual, Fluxus, Dada, set-up photography and appropriation in art-about-art photos, Muniz has, for years, operated in a realm of his own invention. Here, with collages built from cut-up magazines assembled to replicate iconic paintings, Muniz was at the top of his game.

[Deborah Oropallo @ Stephen Wirtz](#). Her technique of “pushing pixels” around a computer screen as if they were globules of wet pigment yields pictorial artifacts that would be difficult if not impossible to create with conventional painting methods. By bringing a painter’s sensibility and skill to a digital medium where “matter” is defined by opposing electronic impulses, Oropallo creates a bizarre, kinky, violent universe – populated by radically reimagined female pop culture heroes from her childhood, which she transforms into action figures of a whole new order. [Read the full-length interview.](#)



Deborah Oropallo: "How Can This be Possible?"

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[Barry McGee @ Berkeley Art Museum](#) . “McGee and his collaborators have swarmed over the museum like a phalanx of army ants, leaving an overwhelmed and utterly transformed institution in its wake, with paintings, drawings, sculpture, video and installation. McGee’s show, which fills the three staggered ground floors of the museum, is a dominating experience, the likes of which have not been seen in a West Coast museum since Takashi Murakami at the Geffen five years ago.” So wrote Renny Pritikin. If you missed out, his story will take you there.

[Linda Connor @ Haines](#) . For more than four decades Connor has sought out and captured spiritual landmarks around the world. This show paired iconic works done in Asia (and printed on silk) with B&W inkjet photos made at Olson House, the scene of Andrew Wyeth’s famous paintings, which Connor photographed in the manner of artists who’ve influenced her. The two series couldn’t be more different; yet both bear Connor’s indelible stamp of otherworldliness; even the droll New England settings that Wyeth painted come off as liminal visions dragged into full consciousness. Read the [full-length artist interview](#) .



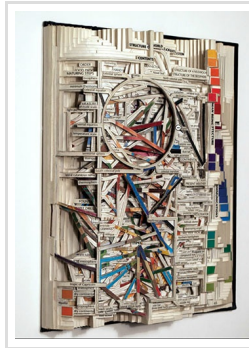
Tony Oursler: "Hierarchical Pastel"

[Tony Oursler @ Paule Anglim](#) . Oursler, a master of video sculpture, further extended his technique of projecting moving images onto inanimate objects. Appearing on disparate materials and shrunk to fit tiny spaces, his projections form a kind of micro theater of the absurd — one whose small scale forces viewers to lean in close to decipher barely audible words and dialog. Psychoanalytic confession, spaghetti western sounds and soap opera and sci-fi dialog coalesce into a heady, neo-Dadaist audio stew. The visual component, plays on backdrops consisting of porcelain figures, crystals, mirrors, transparent marbles, curved tubing and carved wooden figures – all of which are fused together to form sculptures not much bigger than a human cranium.

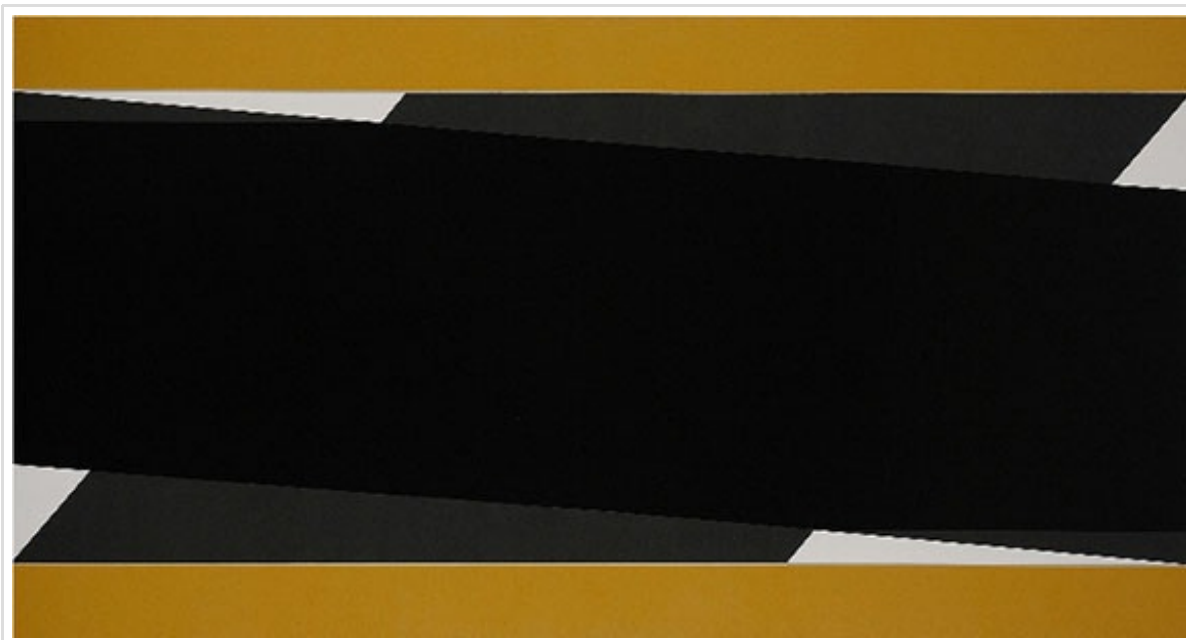
[Mark Bradford @ SFMOMA & YBCA](#) . The most exciting West Coast painter of the 55-and-under generation, Bradford takes the shop-worn practice of abstract mapping to new heights in canvases built of scavenged scraps, posters and billboards. United by paint and all manner

of detritus, they stand as portraits of South Central LA, his home since childhood, where lessons learned on the streets and in his mother's hair salon find direct expression in pictures that reflect and transcend their origins.

[Brian Dettmer @ Toomey Tourell](#). Drawing from bookmaking traditions that pre-date even print culture, Dettmer takes a radical approach to this age-old art form: he turns old books into intricate relief sculptures by surgically carving out their insides. The photos, illustrations and text snippets that remain seem to float in mid-air like frozen animations or disjointed pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, excavated by a razor-wielding savant.



[Don Voisine @ Gregory Lind](#). There's a lot in Voisine's hard-edged, geometric paintings that link him to past masters from Malevich to McLaughlin. But what distinguished these works was theatricality, which is not a quality we normally associate with stuff coming out of Finish Fetish, Constructivism and Minimalism. Combining geometry, line and color to create a proscenium-like effect, Voisine's paintings pull us into black voids the way Sugimoto's time-lapse shots of empty theaters draw us toward the light, like moths to a flame. The pictures are spare, but the experience they afford is transporting.



Don Voisine: "Veer"

[Roger Vail @ JAYJAY](#). It would be easy to assume that the disorienting juxtapositions of architecture, signs, storefronts, interiors, graffiti, people and light found in Vail's pictures are the product of digital doctoring. They are straight photos, and that jaw-dropping fact tells us that startling images such as these are everywhere to be seen — if only we look. Vail, in a state of reverie, stalks city streets with the goal of making pictures of extraordinary scenes hiding in plain view.

[Art of the Book @ Seager Gray](#). If you're a fan of artist-made books, this is a must-see annual event. While many works dazzled with impressive visual effects — created from slicing, sawing, weaving, sewing, compressing, sanding, accessorizing and even vulcanizing — the best came from artists who treated the book conventionally. The Oliver Sacks-Abelardo Morell collaboration, *The Island of Rota*, and *The Lost Journals of Sacajewea*, from Peter Koch Press, were clear standouts.



[Patrick Graham @ Meridian](#). “For over three decades,” wrote Mark Van Proyen, this Dublin-based artist “has been making grave and complex paintings that may be hard to like, but are absolutely impossible to disrespect. His work bespeaks the same weight of heavy cultural burden as does that of Anselm Kiefer, Antonio Tapies and Cy Twombly. Graham is one of those artists who has always ‘found it in the paint,’ and the thing that he has found is a raw, archaic urgency that is always resolved by the actual act of painting. Graham’s work is the real deal.”



Gyöngy Laky: "Why"

[Gyöngy Laky @ b. sakata garo](#). With precisely engineered sculptures built of twigs, branches, toy figures and hardware that spell out words, phrases and symbols, Laky makes art that reflects her interest in architecture, design, geopolitics, eco-activism, language and nature. She is that rare artist who is both a simplifier and a complicator, and her ability to play with colliding opposites gives her art a biting, critical edge: equal parts Giuseppe Penone and Charles Arnoldi.

[One Thing Leads to Another @ SJICA](#). Serial actions underpin some of the most important art of the past century, from Arnold Schoenberg's 12-tone music to Andy Warhol's silk-screened multiples. The reason, I suspect, is that rule-based art making embodies and reconciles our contradictory desire for freedom and structure. This show didn't reframe or reinterpret that legacy – but strong works from Amy Ellingson, Fanny Retsek, Christel Dillbohner, Robin Kandell and others affirmed seriality's vitality as a guiding principle.

[Christian Marclay Video Quartet @ Cantor Arts Center at Stanford](#). In the mode of 24-Hour Clock, the real-time video that won him the Best of the 2011 Venice Biennial award, Marclay, in Video Quartet (2001), re-created the history of song in cinema, splicing together video clips in a dizzying, dissonant 4-channel extravaganza in which performers as disparate as Marilyn Monroe, Frank Sinatra, Jimi Hendrix and Thelonius Monk appear to be in dialog. A one-of-a-kind opportunity for film scholars and music historians to test their mettle. Through Feb. 10.

[SF's Triple-Play Art Fair Weekend](#). No confluence of events in recent memory has galvanized the SF art community as powerfully as the appearance of three art fairs (artMRKT, SF Fine Art Fair and ArtPadSF) — all on the same 3-day May weekend. They've given the city a sense of its importance in a way no number of gallery and museums shows possibly could. Sure, quality varies, as it is with any extravaganza of this size. But by bringing in galleries and artists we don't normally see, not to mention collectors, the fairs inject fresh energy and capital – necessary ingredients for any vital art ecosystem.



ArtPadSF @ the Phoenix Hotel

–David M. Roth

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