

## MODERN ART NOTES

Art-focused Journalism by Tyler Green



In something of a rough, more-or-less-like-this, but not exactly order, my 2013 top ten list:  
1.) **“Donald Judd: The Multicolored Works” at the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts.** Twenty-three Judd sculptures and a couple dozen drawings in a Tadao Ando-designed space, thoughtfully installed by curator Marianne Stockebrand and the Pulitzer staff? That combination made for the most beautiful exhibition of the year. “Judd,” on view through Jan. 4, 2014, shows the full range of Judd’s late color output, from the small pieces regularly on view in Chelsea dealerships, to the larger, more ambitious pieces not often seen in the context of Judd’s multicolored works. Months after I saw “Judd,” I was still thinking through Judd’s combinations of color and form and how the simple-seeming rules he developed to make his color pieces didn’t just make them work, but made them great. ~~There is no catalogue, alas, but~~ kudos to the Pulitzer for putting the illustrated checklist online. *Update:* The Pulitzer says a catalogue is now available, is free if you pay the shipping![MAN Podcast.] [Image: Donald Judd, *Untitled* (84-25) (detail), 1984.]

2.) **“Photography and the American Civil War” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.** Wait, didn’t we know plenty about Civil War photography? Haven’t we seen lots of Barnard and Gardner and what-not? Yes, but two strikingly un-alike exhibitions, last year’s Jennifer Watts-curated “A Strange and Fearful Interest” at the Huntington Library and this Jeff Rosenheim show at the Met, showed us how much richer and more haunting photography of the Civil War was than the headline images. (And as it turns out, the literature on Civil War photography, taken as a whole, is strikingly thin.) The Met’s sort-of-baroque, tent-like

installation could have come across as theatrical, but somehow it worked. [Catalogue, [MAN Podcast.](#)]



Not No. 3 (but should have been). **“John Divola: As Far As I Could Get” at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, the Pomona College Museum of Art and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.** What to do with an exhibition that revealed Divola as one of the most significant artists of his time, as a photographer who deserves to be more fully considered a peer of Joe Deal, Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, William Eggleston and Stephen Shore, but that was incomprehensibly spread across three far-flung southern California institutions? Certainly a Divola retrospective was a service to art, one of the best things to happen in 2013. But the three-institution, ‘single-show’ approach was an insult to the artist, and also to anyone who wanted to see and consider the range of Divola’s oeuvre. (Memo to art institutions: Serving artists and art history only after you’ve served the nebulous and manufactured goal of collaborating with each other is to misunderstand your missions.) Divola also deserves a substantially more thoughtful, thorough and contextualizing catalogue. On the other hand, this project’s strange mix of success and failure opens the door for an east-of-the-Rockies institution to do its own Divola retrospective. [Catalogue, [MAN Podcast.](#)]

4.) **“Jay DeFeo: A Retrospective” at the Whitney Museum of American Art.** Is any American art museum more erratic than the Whitney? It lurches from doing a Hopper show every 10 minutes to market darlings whose oeuvres it effectively and inadvertently exposes as thin to thoughtful collection installations and marvelous historical shows such as “DeFeo.” Curator Dana Miller’s exhibition was a thrill from beginning to end, from early work regularly shown on the West Coast to late paintings that almost no one had seen before. Ironically, “DeFeo” revealed that the Whitney’s own *The Rose* wasn’t DeFeo’s best work, not by a long shot. Miller’s show, which revealed DeFeo’s late work to be every bit the equal of her famed early paintings, also left us all wondering: How great would DeFeo have been if her life hadn’t gone off the rails for a decade or two? (This show debuted in 2012 at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.) [Catalogue, [MAN Podcast.](#)]



5.) **“Richard Diebenkorn: The Berkeley Years, 1953-1966,”** at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco’s de Young Museum. With every exhibition it becomes clearer that Diebenkorn is one of the titans of 20th-century art, the painter who, along with Willem de Kooning, best synthesized the avant-gardes of Europe and America to create his own thing. So why did neither this show nor curator Sarah Bancroft’s Ocean Park exhibition travel to the northeast? Best guess here is that the big Eastern institutions want to do their own Diebenkorn shows in the not-too-distant future, not take someone else’s. [Catalogue, MAN Podcast.]

6.) **“Dorothea Rockburne: Drawing Which Makes Itself”** at the Museum of Modern Art. I’m not the first person to think of this, but was any 2013 New York museum exhibition more relevant to young artists than this one should be? This small survey, mostly of Rockburne’s drawings from the 1970s and on view through Feb. 2, 2014, shines in part because of the way in which Rockburne controls the space with both objects and light. (I’ve never seen more light on a museum wall, which is why the photo here looks so washed out.) It’s too bad that MoMA and curator Esther Adler and curatorial assistant Ingrid Langston didn’t produce a catalogue of this show. Notwithstanding a beautiful 2011 Parrish Art Museum publication, the critical and historical literature on Rockburne is thin. (Yes, it’s a small show, not the sort of exhibition to which MoMA normally develops an expensive-to-produce publication. But given that the show remains up for six more weeks, perhaps MoMA might re-visit its no-catalogue decision and create an e-book catalogue for the show?) [Image: Installation view of "Drawing Which Makes Itself" at MoMA.]

In a related story, the New York critic who has complained most often that MoMA is still a one-gender museum has so far failed to review “Rockburne” or, for that matter, any of MoMA’s last five exhibitions of artists who are female.



7.) **“Face to Face: Flanders, Florence and Renaissance Painting,”** at **The Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens.** Perhaps because exhibitions on view in 2013 were planned and funded during the Great Recession, this was a thin year for expensive-to-mount Old Masters shows. (One of them, the John Marciari and Suzanne Boorsch treatment of Francesco Vanni at the Yale University Art Gallery resulted in a publication on [MAN’s 2013 best books list.](#)) By often paring Italian paintings with the Flemish paintings that motivated them, curators Catherine Hess and Paula Nuttall brought to life the 15th-century’s north-to-south traffic of ideas on the Huntington’s walls. Question via Christopher Knight: [Why wouldn’t the Norton Simon loan this painting to the show?!](#)[Catalogue.]

8.) **“Junipero Serra and the Legacies of the California Missions”** at **The Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens.** I know, I know: This is cheating, at least a little bit. “Serra” was part art-exhibition — it included striking examples of colonial Spanish painting and early American photography, most notably three works from Carleton Watkins’ great mission series — and part history-exhibition about “founding father” Junipero Serra, his impact on California and how it endures to this day. Intentionally or not, “Serra” and curators Steven Hackel and Catherine Gudis pointed to how the relationships between Spain, its colonial dominions, the early United States and the art of all four remains a story we’re only beginning to understand.

Sadly, the show highlights the Huntington’s continuing refusal to publish catalogues of many of its important exhibitions, thus limiting their impact in the worlds of history and ideas. (Also

see No. 2, above.) No art institution hides its light under a lily pond and a desert garden as thoroughly as the Huntington.

9.) **The opening of a David Chipperfield-designed wing of the Saint Louis Art Museum.** The new spaces are reserved and refined. Art, installed by Simon Kelly and Tricia Paik, looks great in them. What more could anybody want? Well, now that I mention it, a bigger expansion. When SLAM opened the new wing it installed its collection throughout, paying special attention to its collection of German contemporary art (which is the second-best such collection in the US). About a third of that space is now special exhibition galleries, meaning that a bunch of super art that should be on view will go back in storage. Museum leadership and the St. Louis donor community seems to have under-shot — St. Louis raised about \$160 million for its expansion, while a few years ago the Nelson-Atkins, in much-smaller Kansas City, raised \$370 million. While that's too bad, the headline here is Chipperfield's success: He created galleries that stand up to the spaces in SLAM's great 1904 Cass Gilbert-designed building.



10.) **“Christopher Wool,” at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.** Yes, this exhibition has flaws — notably the inclusion of so many of Wool's photographs (they may be important to the artist and to his creation of other works, but as artworks they don't hold a wall) and the relative paucity of early works. *Shrug.* Curator Katherine Brinson's exhibition makes a compelling case for Wool as one of the most important American artists of his generation, as a painter as interested in the history of his medium as he is in finding new ways to make paintings and/or works on canvas. With every step around the Guggenheim's ramp the distance between Wool and acolytes such as Wade Guyton (the inexplicably overrated non-painter whose Carnegie International installations may have been the biggest dud of the year), grew. “Wool” remains on view through Jan. 22, 2014. Special kudos to the Guggenheim's interactive team (Laura Kleger, Jennifer Otten, Maria Slusarev, Daniel Yang, and Jake Davis) for this smart side-project. (Note: I have not seen the catalogue for this show.)

10a. (because governmental action isn't exactly art, even if...) **Protections King City, Ont. provided for Richard Serra's landmark earthwork *Shift* (1970-72).** Back in February an exurban governmental body did what both the national and provincial Canadian government failed to do: It enacted protections for one of the most important works of



contemporary art. (And here.) Special thanks and credit goes to councillor Cleve Mortelliti, who has done more to save *Shift* from encroaching development than anyone else I can think of, and to the people of King City who for years have quietly revered the work. (Don't believe me? Walk into the King City library and start asking people about *Shift*. Prepare to be awed.) So why haven't fancy-pants preservation and art groups thrown five-star dinners at which they honor Mortelliti and his fellow councillors with awards? Beats me. [The MAN Podcast's series on *Shift*. My late-winter visit to *Shift*.]

**Honorable mention:** The Detroit Free Press' outstanding coverage of the crisis at the Detroit Institute of Arts, particularly the work of reporter and music critic (!) Mark Stryker; Nasher XChange, the Nasher Sculpture Center's experiment at a community-wide, non-biennial sculpture exhibition that was so successful that it will almost certainly return in a TBD form; Lari Pittman at Regen Projects; Julie Mehretu at Marian Goodman Gallery; "Luc Tuymans: Nice" at the Menil Collection; Jack Whitten at Alexander Gray Associates, the reinstatement of the collection galleries at the Cleveland Museum of Art and the welcome intimacy and refuge they provide from the museum's airport-terminal-like, Rafael Vinoly-designed atrium; SFMOMA's presentation of Mark di Suvero at San Francisco's Crissy Field.

**Shows I didn't see but most wish I had:** Amy Sillman at the ICA Boston, Vanni at YUAG, Katharina Grosse at the Nasher Sculpture Center, "Journey Through Mountains and Rivers," at the Nelson-Atkins, High Desert Test Sites 2013.

**Previously:** MAN's best books of 2013.

**Previous year-end top tens:** 2012, 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007, 2006, 2005, 2004.