

The 10 Best Stories on Art and Politics of 2016

It was a year of unexpected outcomes.

Brian Boucher, December 28, 2016



Deborah Kass, Vote Hillary (2016). Courtesy of the artist and Paul Kasmin Gallery. Miro, London ©Yayoi Kusama.

From giant events like an earth-shaking US presidential election to micro ones like a brouhaha over an exhibition at a museum in St. Louis, 2016 has presented unusually fertile ground for art world news that's rooted in social and political issues.

We've followed these stories closely, and here, we look back on the top 10 stories of the year in art and politics.

1. Art Must Must Admit the Lesson of Donald Trump's Election or Face Irrelevance

National Art Critic Ben Davis reflects on what the art world has to learn in the wake of the shocking ascent of real estate developer and reality television personality Donald J. Trump to the position of leader of the free world.



Kelley Walker, Black Star Press (rotated 90 degrees), 2006. Courtesy the artist; Paula Cooper Gallery, New York; Thomas Dane Gallery, London; and Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne.

2. Artist's Depiction of Police Brutality Sparks Boycott at St. Louis Museum

Kelley Walker's exhibition of works including photographs of Civil Rights-era protest, overlaid with images of smears of substances like chocolate and toothpaste, touched a very sensitive nerve when shown at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis two years after the police killing of Michael Brown.

3. After Brexit, Art Must Break Out of Its Bubble

What does the art world have to do in the face of momentous developments like Britain's vote to leave the European Union?

4. Ai Weiwei Hits a New Low by Crassly Recreating Photo of Drowned Syrian Toddler

Some artists struggle to find a response to a historic refugee crisis in Europe and the Middle East, and the consensus is that Chinese star artist Ai Weiwei showed us one way not to do it.

5. Explosive 'Panama Papers' Highlight Art's Role in Lives of Tax-Dodging Super-rich

Banks in places like Panama, it turns out, are exploited by politicians and art collectors alike to shelter some of their assets.

6. How a Pipeline Is Threatening Native American Culture in North Dakota

Activists rallied to prevent an oil pipeline being directed under Native lands in North Dakota for reasons not only of safety but also of protecting cultural sites. While the Army Corps of Engineers halted construction of the pipeline for now, there's still some worry that the incoming Trump Administration will reverse that decision.



Marina Abramovic Photo Paul Bruinooge/PatrickMcMullan.com.

7. Right-Wing Media Mistakes Marina Abramovic Dinner Party for Satanic Ritual

This one is for sure the most bizarre story bringing together art and politics for the year. What are the chances that a performance artist would get roped into what was already the strangest election campaign in living memory?

8. Director of Polish Culture Institute in Berlin Fired for 'Too Much Jewish Content'

Was the abrupt dismissal of the cultural manager and director of the Polish culture institute in Berlin a result of programming related to Jewish culture? (The Polish Embassy denies it.)

9. Here's What Artists Have to Say About the Future of America Under Donald Trump

From Barbara Kruger to Emma Sulkowicz, Olafur Eliasson to Shepard Fairey, artists weighed in following Election Day.

10. This Is the Art That Mattered From the 2016 Presidential Election

Whether they were With Her or wanted to Make America Great Again, artists were all over this election, making art in support of their candidates or against the other side.

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