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ARTS

Best of 2020

The Most Important Moments in Art in 2020

This was a year of protests and pivots. Monuments fell, museums looked inward. On the bright side, galleries persisted despite the pandemic's grip and curators rolled out magisterial retrospectives.

ROBERTA SMITH

Persistence in the Face of a Pandemic

The main story everywhere this year was the coronavirus: how it disrupted or reshaped specific spheres of activity, or left parts of them largely unscathed. The art world witnessed dizzying combinations of these outcomes, which are still unfolding. One surprise was the almost instantaneous financial fragility of museums and the stalwartness of art galleries of all shapes and sizes. When the virus arrived, an especially strong art season had been underway.

8. 'Jacolby Satterwhite' at Mitchell-Innes & Nash

The multimedia artist Jacolby Satterwhite's magnificent first show at Mitchell-Innes & Nash in October was an engulfing sci-fi pastoral that included a large digital video projection densely populated with sexy androgynous avatars and other groups of creatures and humans performing Mr. Satterwhite's angular choreography, smashing disco-ball meteorites or just standing around looking cool. The show also included sculptures and neon-light wall pieces that riffed on Caravaggio, Manet and maybe Bruce Nauman with Black protagonists. Visitors could sit on a thronelike rattan chair reminiscent of Huey Newton's and experience the video in virtual reality. The pulsing techno music was built on four songs by the artist's mother, who could also be heard singing them. One provided the show's title — "We Are in Hell When We Hurt Each Other." The idea that inflicting pain on others only deepens one's own could not be more germane.