

Art in America

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Top 10 in Painting, 2012

raphael rubinstein 12/24/12

Art in America's critics write their way through the best of 2012. From 1997 to 2007 Raphael Rubinstein was a senior editor at *A.i.A.*, and he continues as a contributing editor. Rubinstein is currently professor of critical studies at the University of Houston. In past years he's authored numerous significant studies of painting in our pages.



[VIEW SLIDESHOW](#) Trevor Winkfield, *The Second Page*, February 2011, Courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery.; Stanley Whitney, *Insideout*, 2011, oil on linen 96 x 96 inches. Courtesy Team Gallery.;

1. Trevor Winkfield at Tibor de Nagy, Nov. 29, 2012–Jan. 12, 2013

Imagine a mad toymaker's workshop reconfigured as a page in Diderot's *Encyclopedie* or Juan Gris reincarnated as a Pop artist. Every millimeter of Trevor Winkfield's densely packed, highly calibrated paintings rewards careful looking. Long appreciated for his enigmatic iconography, Winkfield is also a master of abstract form; this exhibition was one of his best.

2. Stanley Whitney at Team, Mar. 29–Apr. 28

Team Gallery's presentation of three large canvases by Stanley Whitney was one of those rare shows that should have been made into a permanent installation. Paintings with this degree of bold complexity, where beautiful new color-space conundrums emerge every second, can't be comprehended in four weeks, if ever.

3. Jacqueline Humphries at Greene Naftali, Mar. 28–Apr. 28

The cool, disembodied allure of silver paint continues to exert its pull on Humphries, perhaps because it lets her focus on new approaches to mark-making. Here, the self-erasing brushstrokes that dominated her recent shows gave way to grittier smudges and scratches, and intimations of pattern.

4. Jonathan Lasker at Cheim & Read, Feb. 23–Mar. 24

A welcome opportunity to watch (some 30 years after the fact) a young artist assemble, piece by piece, the components of a compelling new vision. By insinuating suburban kitsch and sly figuration into the high-minded legacy of modernist abstraction, Lasker cleared the way for one of the most distinctive and influential styles of recent decades.

5. Chris Martin at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, Jan. 26–Mar. 3

Chris Martin revels in Whitmanesque contradictions: his paintings use everyday stuff in quest of ecstatic mysticism, pitch simple designs at heroic scale, and pursue grand artistic ambition while treating painting as just another thing in the world. This show also offered the most affecting visual tribute I've seen to the late, great Amy Winehouse.

6. Al Loving at Gary Snyder, Nov. 8–Dec. 15

The 1970s was a time when many artists were trying to deconstruct painting, both literally and conceptually. This show of vintage sewn and stained paintings demonstrated that Al Loving, who died in 2005, was not only one of the most radical painter-deconstructionists but also the one who most fully embraced the sensual potential of off-the-stretcher abstraction.

7. Etel Adnan at Callicoon Fine Arts, Sept. 12–Oct. 28

In a storefront gallery hung 14 small abstract landscapes by an 87-year-old experimental writer whose main influence seems to be Nicholas de Staël. Against all expectations, Adnan's paintings looked fresher than anything else concurrently on view on the Lower East Side.

8. Karin Kneffel at Gagosian, Sept. 12–Oct. 20

This former student of Gerhard Richter's has been showing since the late 1980s, but this was my first encounter with her work. Kneffel keeps inventing exciting new ways to interrupt her cinematic photorealism. One grisaille bourgeois living room is interdicted with a massive red X. Exquisitely rendered views of Mies van der Rohe interiors are distorted by psychedelic drips and lava-lamp bubbles.

9. Ernst Wilhelm Nay at Michael Werner and Mary Boone, Sept. 7–Oct. 27

Once upon a time it was an article of belief in the U.S. art world that postwar European abstraction was hopelessly derivative and backward-looking. Our rediscovery of Fontana, Wols and Barré has helped challenge this outdated chauvinism. These revelatory shows of Ernst Wilhelm Nay—a German painter who was included in the Nazis' "Degenerate Art" exhibition, served in the German army during WWII and embraced abstraction in the 1950s (when he was in his 50s)—continued this necessary revisionism.

10. Jan Müller at Lori Bookstein, May 3–June 23

Thanks to loans of major works from MoMA and the Whitney, this exhibition conveyed the greatness and paradoxical situation of Jan Müller, an artist who died in 1958, aged only 36. During the heyday of gestural abstraction, Müller was devoted to symbolist figuration, and painted brooding, luminous versions of mythological and religious subjects, and—as featured here—Goethe's Faust.

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