

# DALLAS Observer

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## 10 Best Art Exhibitions of 2014

By [Lauren Smart](#) Fri., Dec. 19 2014 at 6:29 AM

[http://blogs.dallasobserver.com/mixmaster/2014/12/10\\_best\\_art\\_exhibitions\\_of\\_2014.php](http://blogs.dallasobserver.com/mixmaster/2014/12/10_best_art_exhibitions_of_2014.php)

### Jeremy Couillard's "The Vicious Valley"

This year the Dallas art scene felt rebellious. While one museum exhibition paid homage to a wonderful Dallas-based painter, another had me wanting to commit acts of destruction. At galleries and other exhibitions, the work dripped with anarchy and frustration with the system -- a sentiment felt across the country, and one necessary for art to survive and thrive in a place. There were also a few compelling new media exhibitions (although still too few) in Dallas, and a gallery emerged dedicated to that contemporary art form. The energy of the underground art scene may seem patchy, with the slow collapse of Oliver Francis Galley, and the end of Deep Ellum Windows, and Ware:Wolf:Haus, but all in all it's easy to look back and see a pretty impressive year in review.

### [Sundowner at Circuit 12 Contemporary](#)

This year proved to be a ballsy year for the Design District's Circuit 12 Contemporary. This gallery launched a designer-in-residence program with a mini boutique in the back room; it allowed a muralist to take over the gallery walls; Alex DiJulio rearranged the gallery to send visitors to the stars; and then there was *Sundowner*. This exhibition was all over the map and became a fascinating exploration of how a group show works together or against itself to create or obscure meaning, and then call into question - - at least for me -- whether or not it matters if you "understand" art.

### [The Second to Last Deep Ellum Windows](#)

For a time, Justin Ginsberg and Jeff Gibbons were taking over storefronts in Deep Ellum and asking working Dallas artists to imagine their art inside of them. In cooperation with a local real estate company, these artists were handed the keys for a night to build their own exhibitions. And the second to last was one of the best (although I'll admit to not seeing its end). There were James Michael Starr's *60 Second Steinbecks*, which were clever wordplay videos starring a marching elephant, along with Emily Peacock's portraiture that juxtaposed her with her twin sister. Just wandering into the buildings felt festive and rebellious.

### Isa Genzken at the Dallas Museum of Art (and at MoMA)

When I saw the Isa Genzken exhibition in January at MoMA, it looked like room after room of an oversized yard sale. Garbage suspended on an open umbrella blowing in the breeze of a small rotating fan. That's really part of it. But it stuck in my brain, maybe because of the selfies I took in all the reflective surfaces. It arrived in Dallas this September and suddenly it made more sense to me. The

anarchy was beautiful. The Dallas arts district setting seemed ironically apropos for its down-with-perfection sentiment. And I loved every second wandering through it. I imagined all the ways I could break the museum's rules, like wheeling off one of the suitcases, or knocking over the bald eagle in the American Room. But the guards hovered like hawks, and I'm a chickenshit anyway. Imagining with Isa was pretty damn fun while it lasted.

### [\*\*Dreamarchitectronics at Dallas Contemporary\*\*](#)

I almost didn't see this exhibition. I'd already seen the three concurrent exhibitions at the Dallas Contemporary: a bland Mario Testino photography exhibition, a beautiful tile installation by Cassandra Ermswiler Burd and large scale paintings by Piotr Ułański. Luckily, I was looking at a week devoid of stories and set up an interview with Frank and Lee Dufour to look at their dream machine. It was a computer program loaded with hundreds of videos, matched with soundscapes they created, triggered by sections of poems visitors read aloud to the system. The intricate programming and the environment created for the experience were technologically beautiful, and the system was a whole lot of fun. Next time you see the Dufour name attached to an exhibition, don't hesitate, you might miss it. I almost did.

### ***Draftsmen of the Apocalypse at Central Trak***

Death. Destruction. Chaos. These were the themes of the group exhibition at Central Trak that was beautifully grotesque and filled with local art oddities and treasures. The sheer volume of the work signaled that artists here (and probably everywhere) are fascinated with ideas that seem to spawn from religious systems, but also in the way that they tie to everyday American life. It was also my introduction to the intricate doom-filled drawings of Dallas-based Joachim West, which paired brilliantly with the Goya drawings at the Meadows Museum.

### [\*\*Provocations: The Architecture and Design of Heatherwick Studio at Nasher Sculpture Center\*\*](#)

I'm not one for architectural models. They remind me of dollhouses or dioramas. So, it's rare that I would find myself fascinated by an exhibition dedicated to the design work of a studio. But there's just something about Thomas Heatherwick. The Nasher Sculpture Center's major fall exhibition of his studio's work pivoted from small-scale models to research remnants to sources of inspiration. And each design on display seemed rational, thoughtful, and artful whether it was a handbag for Longchamp or the Olympic Cauldron.

### [\*\*The George W. Bush Painting Exhibition\*\*](#)

One of the questions I like to ask artists when I interview them is whether there's something the media misportrayed about their work or life. It's a question I'd love to be asked myself, and when it happens to me, it's almost always a headline thing. Like my review of the emerging artist George W. Bush, which I headlined "Former President George W. Bush's First Art Exhibition Is Not a Real Art Exhibition." It wasn't a matter of artistic quality but about context, about the presidential center I paid \$16 to enter, the airbrushing of his presidency, the rebranding himself as a figure of folk art. But no one actually read the review, just the headline. The valuable lesson I learned? Don't pack nuance into a headline. That being said, his paintings were kind of charming.

### **DB14**

When Dallas Biennial 14 popped up, I'll admit I didn't understand it. It's a citywide art festival thing, featuring artists from all over the globe exhibited in spaces from abandoned warehouses to galleries at community colleges to the now mostly defunct Oliver Francis Gallery. Jesse Morgan Barnett and Michael Mazurek run it on a shoestring budget, and promote to the inner circle of Dallas art. Most people don't

even know it's happening. And you could even show up at a DB14 exhibition and confuse it for a non-affiliated art exhibition. And because of that, it's not anything specifically that sticks out to me from this year's DB14, but the whole experience. Oh, and the collaboration on the rad --- and final Dallas issue --- of *semigloss*. magazine.

### [David Bates at The Modern](#)

Stylistically, David Bates is one of the most recognizable painters to emerge from Dallas. His angular faces and Gulf Coast landscapes disguise a rigid mastery in an almost mawkish use of color or subject matter. But his large scale paintings on display at The Modern in his two-part retrospective with the Nasher Sculpture Center were compelling as they document pre- and post-Katrina Louisiana, and other parts of Gulf Coast life. The paintings in the 21st century mirror his work from decades prior with symbols becoming revelations, and faces becoming meaningful. Not only does he demonstrate a better use of his medium as he ages, but an avid curiosity for bringing his aesthetic to life in other forms, demonstrated by his sculptural work at the Nasher.

### [Jeremy Couillard at Zhulong Gallery](#)

When Zhulong Gallery showed up on the scene earlier this year, I sent my intern to cover the "new gallery on Dragon Street." But in a few months they've demonstrated that they are so much more than just another gallery. They display the new media art of regional and international artists, and the best thus far has been the vibrant exhibition of Jeremy Couillard's cyber art. I said then, "He creates his landscapes in saccharine colors that appear like vestigial flickers of contemporary gaming." Still one of the coolest exhibitions I've ever seen in a Dallas gallery.