

Cecilia Alemani, 'TOP TEN: Cecilia Alemani's highlights of 2021'  
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## ARTFORUM

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# TOP TEN

Cecilia Alemani's highlights of 2021

An Italian curator based in New York, Cecilia Alemani is the curator of the upcoming 59th Venice Biennale. Since 2011, she has been the director and chief curator of High Line Art, the public art program presented by the High Line in New York. In 2017, she curated the Venice Biennale's Italian Pavilion.



Paula Rego, *Untitled No. 6*, 1998–99, pastel on paper on aluminum, 43 × 39 3/8".

## 1

### PAULA REGO (TATE BRITAIN, LONDON; CURATED BY ELENA CRIPPA WITH ZUZANA FLASKOVÁ)

This uncompromising survey was a reminder of art's power to confront humanity's darkest impulses. Rego, who grew up in fascist Portugal in the 1930s and '40s before relocating to London in 1951, depicts subjects including violence against women, the suppression of freedom of speech, and the brutality of colonial politics. Her late-1990s Abortion works, painted in response to the draconian reproductive-rights laws in her native country, has never been more relevant. Rego is a masterful storyteller: With expressionist pastel on paper, she paints a vivid fresco of the modern human condition.

*Co-organized with Kunstmuseum Den Haag, the Netherlands, and Museo Picasso Málaga, Spain.*



Yuri Ancarani, *Atlantide*, 2021, 8K video, color, sound, 105 minutes.

## 2

### YURI ANCARANI, *ATLANTIDE* (THE 78TH VENICE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL)

What happens at night as Venice sleeps? Far from the romantic stereotypes of gloomy stillness that still cloak this sinking mirage of a city, Ancarani, one of Italy's most interesting filmmakers and artists, introduces viewers to the population of young men who trick out their boats—*barchini*, in the local dialect—to reach speeds that would be illegal on any mainland highway, let alone in the waters of Venice, the most serene Bride of the Seas.



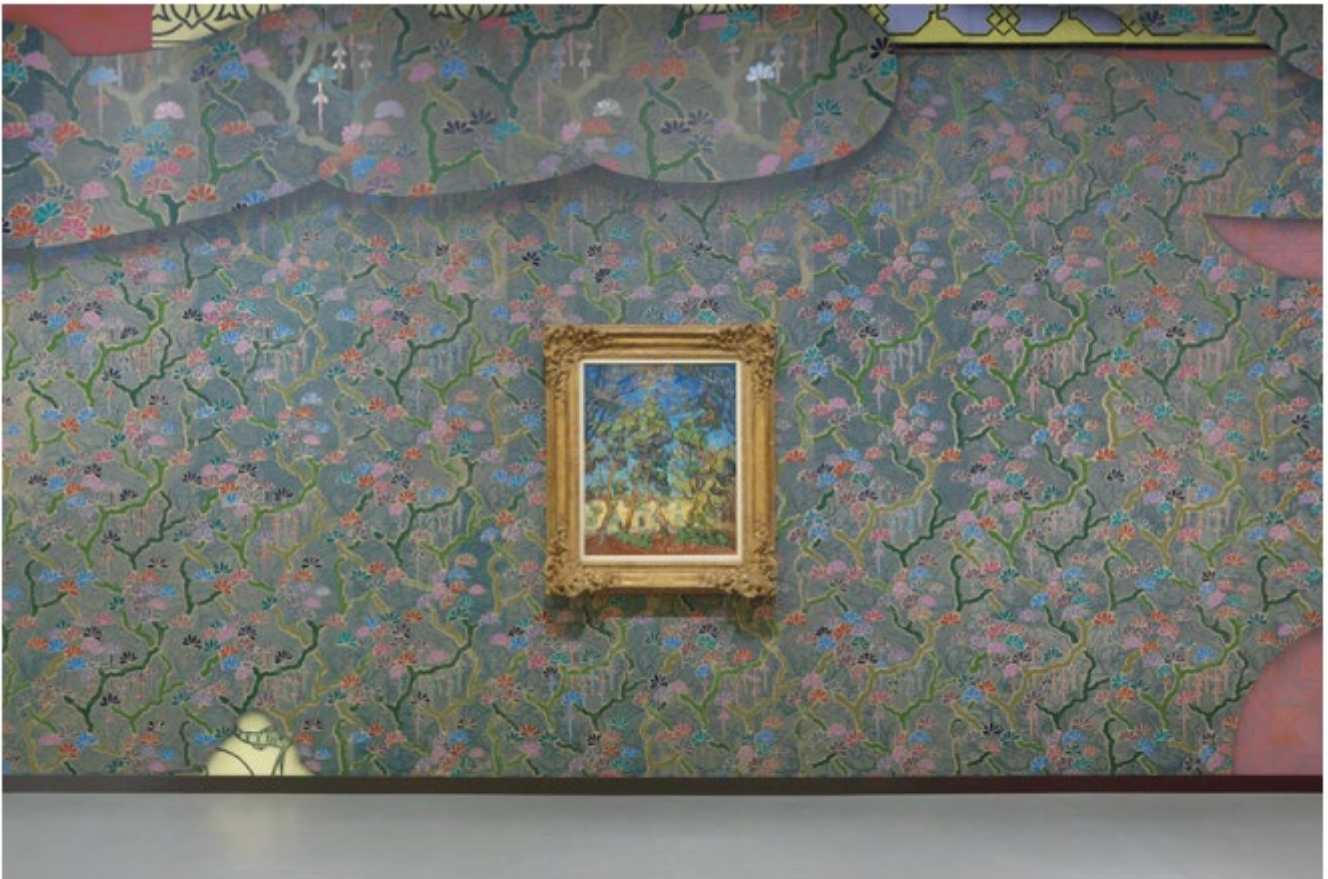


Precious Okoyomon, *Fragmented Body Perceptions as Higher Vibration Frequencies to God*, 2021, moss, gravel, soil, ladybugs, crickets, mud, anoles, kudzu ash, wildflowers. Installation view, Performance Space New York. Photo: Da Ping Luo.

### 3

#### PRECIOUS OKOYOMON (PERFORMANCE SPACE, NEW YORK)

For their New York solo debut, Okoyomon transformed Performance Space into a garden inhabited by crickets, ladybugs, moss, and wildflowers. But what seemed peaceful turned into an ecosystem of grief: Wet ash obtained from burned kudzu vines fell gently onto visitors from devices installed on the ceiling—a reminder of the history of slavery in the South.



View of “Laura Owens & Vincent van Gogh,” 2021, Fondation Vincent van Gogh, Arles, France. Mural: Laura Owens, *Untitled*, 2021. Hanging: Vincent van Gogh, *Hospital at Saint-Rémy*, 1889. Photo: Annick Wetter.

#### 4

### **“LAURA OWENS & VINCENT VAN GOGH” (FONDATION VINCENT VAN GOGH, ARLES, FRANCE; CURATED BY BICE CURIGER AND MARK GODFREY)**

Setting aside its unintentionally grandiose title, “Laura Owens & Vincent van Gogh”—one has to assume that Owens came first due to alphabetical conventions—this remarkable exhibition was at its best when the California-based artist stood literally in the background, where she quietly stole the show. Owens crafted maddeningly intricate wallpapers as the grounds for van Gogh’s paintings and created patterned, sculptural books that carefully showcased his letters and memories, available for visitors to flip through and ponder (as in “weigh,” with some tomes balancing on hidden scales). As one often does in the presence of great art, I left impressed that van Gogh and Owens, each in their own way, could find the time and the love necessary to devote so much attention to the minutiae of art and life while simultaneously painting some pretty good paintings.





Philippe Parreno, *Sonic Waterlilies*, 2021, transducers, electric cables, Plexiglas, amplifiers, Fluorescein, water, theta waves. Installation view, Parc des Ateliers, Luma Foundation, Arles, France. Photo: Marc Damage.

## 5

### PHILIPPE PARRENO AND PIERRE HUYGHE (LUMA FOUNDATION, ARLES, FRANCE)

Laura Owens's swarming microcosms of forms offered a perfect counterpart to grandiose new commissions by Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe nearby at the newly completed Luma Foundation, where strangely inhuman universes teemed with bees, ants, robots, and mutant cuttlefish. With additional presentations in Arles such as the Alona Pardo-curated "Masculinities," also at the Luma Foundation, and part of the *Rencontres de la Photographie*, this season of shows found the city strangely perched on the cusp between the past and the future, longing for a lost humanism and envisioning a world without us.



Barbara Hepworth, *Oval Sculpture (N° 2)*, 1943, plaster, wood base, 11 1/2 × 15 3/4 × 10".

6

**WOMEN IN ABSTRACTION (CENTRE POMPIDOU, PARIS; CURATED BY CHRISTINE MACEL AND KAROLINA LEWANDOWSKA WITH LEKHA HILEMAN WAITOLLER)**

This thoughtful exhibition—at times elegant and subtle, at times explosive and brash—brought together a heterogeneous group of more than five hundred works by more than one hundred women artists, from the spiritualist hallucinations of Georgiana Houghton and Hilma af Klint to the sinuous curves of Barbara Hepworth, from Carla Accardi's bright glyphs to Eva Hesse's eccentric abstractions to the corporeal shapes of Huguette Caland. Combining painting with design, fashion, dance, and theater, the exhibition choreographed an ebullient ballet of forms, celebrating seemingly endless incarnations of abstraction and life.

*Co-organized with the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, where it remains on view through February 27, 2022.*

**THE BIENNIALS OF 2021**

All of 2021's biennials (some of which I have missed because of Covid-19 travel restrictions), including the Liverpool Biennial, curated by Manuela Moscoso; the Gwangju Biennial, organized by Defne Ayas and Natasha Ginwala; the São Paulo Bienal, curated by Ruth Estévez, Paulo Miyada, Francesco Stocchi, Jacopo Crivelli Visconti, and Carla Zaccagnini; the New Museum Triennial, curated Jamillah James and Margot Norton; Greater New York, organized by Ruba Katrib, Serubiri Moses, Kate Fowle, and Inés Katzenstein; the Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts; Momenta Biennale de l'Image in Montreal; the Seoul Mediacity Biennale; Prospect New Orleans; and Performa in New York. I know how much effort it takes to put together shows like these during the pandemic, and my hat is off to all the curators, artists, art handlers, installers, registrars, shippers, and exhibition designers who managed, against all odds and often at great personal cost, to pull off these incredible events.



Simone Fattal, *Ra with Isis*, 2021, glazed stoneware, two pieces, bronze figure: 17 1/4 × 13 1/2 × 9"; black figure: 15 3/4 × 3 1/8 × 3 1/8". Photo: Andrea Rossetti.



**SIMONE FATTAL (ICA MILANO, ITALY; CURATED BY ALBERTO SALVADORI WITH ANDREA VILIANI, STELLA BOTTAI, AND LAURA MARIANO)**

Fattal turns the industrial space of the ICA Milano into a celebration of Pompeian color. The Syrian-born, Lebanese-raised artist created ceramic figurines that, like the artifacts at Pompeii that inspired her, hover in frozen time, between form and formlessness, and powerfully evoke the truth we have been so frequently reminded of these past several months: the fragility of human life.

*On view through January 9, 2022. Co-organized with Pompeii Commitment. Archaeological Matters.*



Niki de Saint Phalle with Pierre Marie Lejeune, *Visage (face)*, 1999, patinated brass, glass and mirror mosaics, low-intensity electric light. Installation view, Palazzo Collacchioni, Capalbio, Italy, 2021. Photo: Viviana Panaccia.



**NIKI DE SAINT PHALLE (PALAZZO COLLACCHIONI, CAPALBIO, ITALY)**

Given the renewed appreciation for *en plein air* art since the beginning of the pandemic, a magnificent project like Niki de Saint Phalle's *Tarot Garden*, 1979–2002, becomes even more relevant. After visiting her joyful retrospective at MoMA PS1 in New York last summer, I made my way to the little town of Capalbio in Tuscany, where Lucia Pesapane staged a small but precious exhibition of Phalle's work in a medieval tower. A few miles away, hordes of people every day visit the artist's epic *Tarot Garden* where they wander among her giant empresses, shiny dragons, sensual lovers, and other magical creatures sculpted over two decades.



Magdalene Odundo, *Untitled*, 2020, terra-cotta, 22 × 14 1/8 × 14 1/8".

**MAGDALENE ODUNDO (SALON 94, NEW YORK)**

Odundo shapes her anthropomorphic vases by hand, smoothing and burnishing the clay surfaces with stones and gourds. This laborious process yields sensual vessels that evoke various body parts such as breasts, belly buttons, mouths, and genitalia, all entangled with one another. I don't have art in my apartment, but I would like to live with one of these gorgeous vases, so full of life as they are.