

Art

The Best of 2021: Our Top 10 United States Art Shows

Our favorite US shows of 2021, brought to you by the writers and editors of Hyperallergic.



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Emma Amos, "Equals" (1992), acrylic on linen canvas with African fabric borders, 6 feet 4 inches x 6 feet 10 inches (private collection)

Thanks to the beloved Hyperallergic contributors located around the country, we are able to bring you a list of 10 knockout exhibitions across several states this year. As someone who did limited traveling in 2021, working with these writers and reading their words on art has expanded my horizons. I hope they can do the same for you. —*Elisa Wouk Almino, Senior Editor*

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1. Four Solo Artist Exhibitions Across Philadelphia



Installation view, *Emma Amos: Color Odyssey* (photo by Joseph Hu, image courtesy the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2021)

This fall, there was a bounty of artist retrospectives at museums across Philadelphia. **Joan Semmel at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art** (PAFA), **Suzanne Valadon at the Barnes Foundation**, and **Emma Amos** and **Jasper Johns at the Philadelphia Museum of Art**. While each was notable and worth seeing on its own right, together they are a tour de force, demonstrating the power of a city's art institutions to offer a wide arrange of material that speaks to many audiences. Touring the shows in one day felt like getting an in-depth education in portraiture, identity, gender politics in modern and contemporary art, and many other things. While some of the shows were smaller than many would've liked, they certainly whetted our appetites for more. More of this excellence, please. Read below for

more on the Amos show, which contributor Ilene Dube chose as her favorite show of the year. —*Hrag Vartanian*

Emma Amos is having a moment, albeit posthumously. The only woman and youngest person to be invited to join Spiral, a New York-based collective of African American artists active in the 1960s and '70s, Amos joins the pantheon of octogenarian and nonagenarian women finally getting retrospectives in major museums. Amos, who died last year, was a professor at the Mason Gross School of Art, Rutgers University, when it was a hotbed of the feminist art movement, a movement she actively participated in. Among the highlights of *Emma Amos: Color Odyssey*, curated by Laurel Garber and Shawnya L. Harris, is “Tightrope” (1994), which employs Amos’s signature technique of African textile borders. The artist paints herself in a Wonder Woman costume that peeks out from her painter’s smock, her balancing on the tightrope suggestive of the struggles Amos faced as an artist without the privileges afforded to White masculinity. —*Ilene Dube*