1 Roger Ballen (Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, CA) Prior to seeing this eye-opening survey (organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego), I’d given almost no thought to Ballen’s creepy, surreal-ish photographs. Since seeing it I’ve thought of little else. There’s a lot to be wary of (and possibly even dislike) in Ballen’s work: e.g., the apparent “manipulation” of his seemingly disenfranchised South African subjects (collaborators?) or the way he makes poverty appear somehow theatrical, poetic even. Yet Ballen is such a profoundly strange artist that I’m willing to forgive him (almost) anything.

2 “Andy Warhol’s Time Capsules” (Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh) Surveying the contents of a mere eighteen of Warhol’s some six hundred “time capsules” was, frankly, overwhelming. Among the hundreds of gems Warhol squirreled away in these boxes (on view through January 2) were Clark Gable’s shoes, the drafts of Warhol’s 1964 “resignation” letter to his then-dealer Eleanor Ward, and the detritus of his mother’s sad, byzantine Catholic existence. Simultaneously a portrait of the artist and of the times he lived through—and created—Warhol’s time capsules may well be the greatest nonartworks of the twentieth century.

3 Bruce Nauman, Raw Materials (Tate Modern, London) Raw Materials saw Nauman plundering his own extensive back catalogue of text(ual) works to create an anxious “greatest hits” sound installation throughout Tate Modern’s forbidding Turbine Hall (where it remains on view until March 28). From Work Work through 100 Live and Die to No No No No—New Museum/Walter and Get Out of My Mind, Get Out of This Room, Nauman’s orderly cacophony came across as a paranoid riposte to the trippy spectacle of Olafur Eliasson’s previous Turbine Hall crowd-pleaser, The Weather Project, 2003.
4 “Power, Corruption and Lies” (Roth Horowitz, New York) Preempting the summer’s rash of overliterary-minded anti- Bush exhibitions, Adam McEwen and Neville Wakefield’s modest—and slyly political—group show was a curatorial gem. Thirty-six artists, including Lutz Bacher, Wallace Berman, Jeremy Deller, Öyvind Fahlström, Scott King, Nate Lowman, Aleksandra Mir, and Cady Noland, wrestled with what the curators charmingly described as “the smell of putrefaction that tends to curl around the shoulders of power.”

5 “Lee Lozano, Drawn from Life: 1961–1971” (P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, New York) P.S. I was, hands down, my space of the year: Everything I saw there looked great. None more so than director Alanna Heiss and curatorial advisor Bob Nickas’s revealing survey of the eclectic (and eccentric) work of Lee Lozano (1930–1999). The epithet “maverick” was custom-made for Lozano, whose sometimes bad-tempered and often caustically funny art left this viewer wishing he’d had the opportunity to meet her.

6 “Indigestible Correctness I & II” (Participant Inc. and Kenny Schachter/ROVE, New York) Lutz Bacher, Brian Degraw, Jimmy DeSana, Isa Genzken, Richard Kern, Kemba Pfahler, Francis Picabia, Richard Prince, and Christopher Wool headed up the very savvy cast of Rita Ackermann and Lizzi Bougatsos’s angular and angsty two-part group show that made me wonder, “Why can’t museums organize shows like this?”

7 “Thrown: Influences and Intentions of West Coast Ceramics” (Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver) The influence of the visionary British studio potter Bernard Leach on a generation of West Coast Canadian potters in the ’60s and ’70s might not sound like a recipe for one of the most compelling exhibitions of the year; but in the hands of curators Lee Plested, Scott Watson, and Charmian Johnson this exquisite (and beautifully installed) material positively sang. Watson’s inspired programming at the Belkin has always taken unexpected (and unprecedented) turns, and “Thrown” gently amplified his idiosyncratic vision.

8 “The Thought That Counts” (Sister, Los Angeles) LA-based sculptor Jason Meadows blurred the lines between curation and collaboration in this wonderfully odd project in which he created pedestals, plinths, bases, props, or supports for existing and newly
commissioned sculptures by friends and peers like Liz Larner, Evan Holloway, Sean Landers, and Liz Craft. Seen together, the resultant “hybrids” (for want of a better term) displayed a joyous harmony born of confused and multiple authorship.

9 “Beyond Geometry: Experiments in Form, 1940s–70s” (Los Angeles County Museum of Art) LACMA curator Lynn Zelevansky’s “Beyond Geometry” was an often subjective (global) romp through all things process, serially, and geometrically inclined: a (very) capacious church that found room for, among many others, Josef Albers, Blinky Palermo, Mel Bochner, and Karen Carson’s (unknown-to-me) kinky cotton-duck-and-zipper “painting.” Claustrophobically installed—in a good way—and full of illuminating diversions (Franz Eberhard Walther finally getting some kind of dues), “Beyond Geometry” was, despite its boring title, Tinseltown’s summer sleeper.

10 Mark Leckey, “Septic Tank” (Gavin Brown’s Enterprise, New York) Leckey’s one-room apartment in London’s West End—the cramped laboratory from which he works his increasingly weird cultural alchemy—has taken center stage in much of his recent production. “Septic Tank” free-associated among a peculiar cast of characters, including the late Patrick Proctor, Jacob Epstein, Graham Greene, actor Phil Daniels, Little Richard (a “religious icon,” according to Leckey), and Jeff Koons. Simultaneously melancholic and celebratory, Leckey’s recent brand of bed-sit conceptualism perfectly mirrors our increasingly unsettled times.

Matthew Higgs is the director and chief curator at White Columns, New York, and a regular contributor to Artforum.
Matthew Higgs

Roger Bateley

Matthew Higgs is the director of Turner Contemporary and the founder and director of 303 Gallery. He is currently the Curator of the Turner Prize and the recipient of the 2018 Turner Prize. He is known for his work in the fields of contemporary art and design, and has been involved in numerous exhibitions and projects.

 Powers, Corruption and Lies

Brian Horrocks, New York. puppy's stillness is a powerful narrative element in contemporary art. In this exhibition, Mathew McLean and Vincent Wakefield's soft sculptures are political and social commentaries on the state of the world today. The work is a commentary on the current political landscape and its impact on society.

 The Thought That Counts

Susan Rothenberg, Los Angeles. The works of Susan Rothenberg and Rothenberg's studio are on display at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. The exhibit features works that explore the relationship between art and society, and the role of the artist in today's world.

 Beyond Geometry: Experiments in Form, 1940s-70s

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The exhibit explores the evolution of geometric and abstract art from the 1940s to the 1970s, highlighting the work of artists such as Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell, and Jasper Johns.

 Indelible Correctiveness

Larry Goodyear, T/L Magazine. The article explores the relationship between art and technology, focusing on the work of artists such as Larry Goodyear, who uses technology as a medium for artistic expression.

 The Sperm Bank

Mark Kostabi, New York. The exhibit features the work of Mark Kostabi, known for his playful and satirical art, and explores the relationship between art and the human body.

 In the Eye of the Beholder

David Hockney, Los Angeles. The exhibit features works by David Hockney, known for his graphic novels and his exploration of the relationship between art and technology. The exhibit highlights the work of Hockney in various mediums, including painting, drawing, and printmaking.
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