To celebrate *frieze*’s quarter century, the editors decided to choose 25 significant artworks, one for each year of the magazine’s existence. We underestimated how hard this task would be. After hours of often-heated debate, we finally agreed on a group of artworks from around the world that reflect something important about the time in which they were made, whose influence has grown over the years and which still feel urgent, fresh and relevant today. However, as editors and writers, we are, of course, fallible. For every nomination, there are countless others that could replace it, many from countries we haven’t covered as comprehensively as we have our primary locations in the UK, US and mainland Europe. (A timeline running alongside this feature lists other significant works from the past two and a half decades.) That said, we hope that our list is a reflection of the important role the skill and imagination of artists has played, and continues to play, in interpreting the dizzyingly swift evolution of our planet over the last 25 years.
1991

Felix Gonzalez-Torres
"Untitled" (Perfect Lovers)

If 1991 saw the aggressive, muscular art of Damien Hirst invite viewers to stare their mortality in the face in the form of a pickled shark, it was also marked by the emergence of a quieter conceptualism in Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s "Untitled" (Perfect Lovers). Also concerned with impermanence and preservation, this work, like many by Gonzalez-Torres, memorializes his relationship with his partner Ross Laycock, who had died from AIDS the year before. (The work is occasionally dated 1987–90: the duration of the Ross’s illness.) Two identical battery-operated wall clocks sit side by side, gently touching: one will inevitably stop before the other. Using form and allusion, rather than directly representing the couple, the work echoes the queer theory of its time, which sought to trouble definitions or fixed identities, whilst privileging ambiguity. Resonances of this queer formalism can be seen today in the work of artists such as Carol Bove, Prem Sahib and Danh Vo. The late Gonzalez-Torres was, this year, the subject of concurrent shows in London, Milan and New York (which are reviewed in this issue). — Paul Clinton
Rirkrit Tiravanija
untitled (free)

If you were to walk into an exhibition today and come across a work that required you to participate in a social act in order to ‘see’ it, you might not find it unusual. But when, in 1992, Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija invited visitors to share a free meal, it was revolutionary. For untitled (free), Tiravanija turned the back office of 303 Gallery in New York into a kitchen and transformed the gallery into a communal space where visitors could serve themselves Thai curry and rice prepared by the artist. The work, which has since been re-imagined and restaged in various venues, is now regarded as one of the first instances of relational aesthetics – works that require their audience to become social participants in art. — Christy Lange

Tracey Emin & Sarah Lucas
The Shop

In 1993, Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas were looking for a studio. Instead, they opened a shop. They made almost all the merchandise themselves: ashtrays featuring Damien Hirst’s face, for instance, or T-shirts emblazoned with the slogan ‘Complete Arsehole’. Located in London’s pre-gentrified East End, The Shop was open during regular working hours and all through Saturday night into Sunday afternoon. Anyone could drop by, have a drink and a chat or, perhaps, buy something, such as Our David, their David Hockney-themed altarpiece. The Shop was a social space: a public art-work minus the sanctimony of ‘socially engaged’ art. Today, it remains a model of artists getting-by-and-making – with few resources, a ‘pop-up’ venue before such a thing became a marketing tool and, above all, a space with a healthy sense of irreverence towards arts institutions. — Dan Fox
Kara Walker
*Gone: An Historical Romance of a Civil War as It Occurred between the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart*

The iconic medium and style that have defined Kara Walker's career first appeared in this wall installation, which featured in the artist's 1994 New York debut at the Drawing Center. Walker transformed the small-scale, petit-bourgeois Victorian craft of paper silhouettes into a new form of history painting. Her caricatured figures - what Robert Storr called, in this magazine, "burlesque pantomimes of American racism" - couple in positions that furiously parody the sexual violence of slavery. 'Gone' in the title refers to Margaret Mitchell's 1936 classic novel *Gone with the Wind*, offering a dark and soaring alternative to its nostalgic treatment of plantation life, while also acknowledging the absence of black voices in the official history of American race relations - one that remains contested today. — Evan Moffitt
El Anatsui

Fan

In 1995, two decades after his move from Ghana to Nigeria, El Anatsui held his first British solo exhibition in London. He was 51. Like Fan, many of the totemic sculptures and wall-hung reliefs shown at October Gallery that year featured visible scars and burn marks. Anatsui had begun using a blowtorch and chainsaw ('a very evocative sculpture tool', he has said) in 1980. Although best known for his 'tapetries' made from discarded aluminium bottle tops, the artist's middle period was largely devoted to wood. The reworked osyili-ol panels in this relief declare Anatsui's transformative approach to his materials—a method that endures in his current work. The violent technique, while at odds with the unburdened manner of their maker, enabled Anatsui to ally method with metaphor: Fan, and similar works from this period, not only mourns the 'historic vandalism' of colonialism, to quote Olu Oguibe, but also ennobles the 'plthora of writing traditions' that Anatsui devoted his early career to learning. — Sean O'Toole

Chris Ofili

The Holy Virgin Mary

British artist Chris Ofili's The Holy Virgin Mary is one of the most controversial artworks of the mid-1990s. After causing a stir in 'Sensation' at London's Royal Academy in 1997, the work travelled to New York in 1999 to be installed at the Brooklyn Museum for the show's US iteration: the then-Mayor of New York, Rudolph Giuliani, declared that the painting offended him (despite not having seen it) and it became a subject of national debate.

The reason for the furore? Ofili's black Madonna is decorated with painted and varnished elephant dung: one ball of it, covered in glitter, stands in for one her breasts. Details from pornographic magazines float across the vivid yellow background and the painting is displayed resting on two further lumps. Raised a Catholic, and as interested in spirituality as he is in art history, Ofili has described his work as a hip-hop version of old master paintings of the Virgin Mary. The artist's use of non-traditional materials and his explosive intertwining of identity politics, religion and popular culture have become the norm for a younger generation of painters, such Sanya Kantarovsky, Ella Kruglyanskaya and Dana Schutz. — Jennifer Higgle
Steve McQueen
Deadpan

A powerfully built black man stands in front of an imposing wooden house. A small, square window interrupts its facade. Re-enacting the classic moment from Buster Keaton's film *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928) when the hapless actor looks set to be crushed by a falling building only to be saved by a well-placed window, the young Steve McQueen, his back to the house, stands stock still as the structure falls around him. Just under five minutes long, silent and shot on 16mm film, *Deadpan* is shown on a continuous loop. The camera, between sudden switches of angle, lingers on the artist's body like an ominous, fetishizing eye. Although McQueen has gone on to make a number of critically acclaimed feature-length films, *Deadpan* distills elements that have come to be seen as hallmarks of his practice: an unflinching confrontation with the potential of violence communicated through the smallest inflections of the camera's focus. — Paul Trusdale

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1
El Anatsui
Fan, 1995, cyklo-aji,
76 × 83 × 2 cm

2
Chris Ofili
The Holy Virgin Mary, 1996,
acrylic, oil, polyester resin, paper collage, glitter,
map pins and elephant dung on linen, 24 × 1.8 m

3
Steve McQueen
Deadpan, 1997, 16mm film still

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Martin Kippenberger
*The Happy End of Franz Kafka's 'Amerika'*

Mark Wallinger
*A Real Work of Art*

1995

John Currin
*Entertaining with Mr. Acker Bilk*

Tracey Emin
*Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995*

Moshekwa Langa
*Untitled*

Paul McCarthy
*Painter*

Qian Weikang
*Ventilating the Site*

1996

Liam Gillick
*The What If? Scenario*

Sheola Gower
*Gallant Hearts*

Gu Dexin
*Meat*

Zbigniew Libera
*Lego Concentration Camp*

Mrinalini Mukherjee
*Aranyani*

1997

Fischli & Weiss
*Visible World*

Rodney Graham
*Vexation Island*

Johan Grimonprez
*Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*

Sarah Lucas
Pauline Bunny

Tracey Moffatt
*Up in the Sky*

Pipilotti Rist
*Ever Is Over All*

1998

Jane Alexander
*Bom Boys*

Monica Bonvicini
*Plastered*

Rummana Hussain
*Is It What You Think?*

Piotr Uklanski
*The Nazis*
Wolfgang Tillmans

friends

'Each photograph Wolfgang Tillmans takes and prints is part of a collective,' wrote Julie Ault. Tillmans himself has said: 'I do want each picture to be understood as its own self-sufficient entity.' friends embodies both of these positions. Three male heads on an orange-red pillow; two of the men (one with a prominent safety-pin earring) are cuddling, while the third faces the opposite direction. Although he is partially cropped out of the scene, his hair softly touches the shorn skull of one of his friends and he seems very much part of a moment of union and warmth. The constellation feels personal, but it's also an iconic representation of three people challenging both monogamous norms and the assumption that males are supposed to bond without getting too intimate. Taken in the year Northern Ireland entered the Good Friday agreement, the Kosovo War commenced, and the year after Tillmans lost his partner, Jochen Klein, to AIDS, this picture, and the people in it, are a self-sufficient entity and part of a collective.

— Jörg Heiser

Mark Leckey

Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore

At time of writing, Mark Leckey's video Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore, has had 142,134 views on YouTube — a cult following rare for a work of art. It was created with found documentary footage — sourced years before YouTube provided online access to long-lost TV shows and documentaries — to trace a history of British dance culture and working-class youth: Northern Soul all-nighters of the 1970s, 1980s soul weekender, the acid house explosion and the raves left in its dying embers. The video's impressionistic soundtrack and the ghostly grain of VHS tape express how the textures of technology have shaped personal memory and shared pop culture. Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore would prove to be an influential work for subsequent generations of artists exploring the tensions of life between the analogue and digital realms, and the legacies of British pop culture.

— Dan Fox
Francis Alÿs
Re-enactments

On 4 November 2000, the Belgian-born, Mexico-based artist Francis Alÿs was filming buying a 9mm Beretta from a gun store in Mexico City. He then left the shop with the loaded weapon held visibly in his right hand and walked the streets with his collaborator, Rafael Ortega, filming him. About 12 minutes later, a police car sped up behind Alÿs and aggressively apprehended him. After negotiating his release, the artist convinced the officers to re-enact the arrest, with Ortega filming it again. The ‘real’ version of Alÿs’s performance and the ‘re-enactment’ are shown side by side in Re-enactments. Alÿs used this provocative action – at a time when the city was experiencing an elevated level of crime – to highlight the indistinct boundaries between the real and the staged in videoed performances. Though he has since expressed regret about Re-enactments portraying a clichéd, violent version of Mexico City, the work remains one of the most oft-cited of his poignant interventions into the public life of the city. — Christy Lange

1 Wolfgang Tillmans
From, 1998
C-type print, 10 × 15 cm

2 Mark Leckey
Franco Made Me Hardcore, 1999, video still

3 Francis Alÿs
Re-enactments, 2000, photographic print, photograph unknown

Courtesy
1 the artist and Maureen Paley, London 2 the artist and Cabinet, London 3 the artist and David Zwirner, New York

1999
Doug Aitken
Electric Earth
Maurizio Cattelan
The Ninth Hour
Andreas Gursky
99 Cent
Zarina Hashmi
Home Is a Foreign Place
Susan Hillier
Psi Girls
Laura Owens
Untitled

2000
Martin Creed
Work No. 227 The lights going on and off
Tacita Dean
Teignmouth Electron
Thomas Hirschhorn
Deleuze Monument
Julie Mehretu
Arcadia and Bushwick Burning
Mike Nelson
The Coral Reef
Christoph Schlingensief
Foreigners Out!
Santiago Sierra
Workers who cannot be paid, remunerated to remain inside cardboard boxes

2001
Kai Althoff
Aus Dir
Jeremy Deller
The Battle of Orgreave
Harun Farocki
Eye/Machine I
Emily Jacir
Where We Come From
Michael Landy
Breakdown
Gregor Schneider
Dead House ur

2002
Michaël Borremans
The German
Damián Ortega
Cosmic Thing
William Pope Jr
The Great White Way
Andrea Fraser
Little Frank and His Carp

Famous for her deadpan, parodic performances that meld comedy with institutional critique, Andrea Fraser took on the Guggenheim in *Little Frank and His Carp*, which records an incognito visit to the museum’s then-new Frank Gehry–designed outpost in Bilbao, Spain. Captured on hidden cameras, a scantily clad Fraser wanders through the museum’s lobby, fondling an audio guide, taking literally its paternal voice’s invitation to run her hand along the curved lobby walls, before engaging in all-out frrottage with the institutional architecture (much to the horror and laughter of the unsuspecting tourists nearby). Her comic, masturbatory performance suggests that the ‘Bilbao effect’ — the presumed ability of flashy new museums to be engines of gentrification and magnets for cultural tourism — privileges vessels over their contents and forces art to serve a neoliberal agenda. The world still suffers its influence. — Evan Moffitt

Lu Jie
Long March Project: A Walking Visual Display

The early 2000s will be remembered as the moment that the Chinese art market took off. As an MA student at London’s Goldsmiths College in the late 1990s, Lu watched from afar the impact of the West’s increasing commercial and academic interest on the region. While still in the UK, he began planning what would become the Long March Project: *A Walking Visual Display*. Taking its name from one of the People’s Republic of China’s foundation myths — the Red Army’s 6,000-mile retreat from Nationalist forces in 1936–37 — Lu’s expedition mapped out 20 sites along the original march. In each, artists would present work that aimed to engage with local communities, taking art into rural populations in a way that deliberately mimicked the spread of communist ideology in the 1930s. The project made it to 12 of the 20 planned sites, but Long March has continued to exist in shifting incarnations — as a New York non-profit and, latterly, a commercial gallery — proposing an innovative model for how art organizations might exist outside of conventional, Western art-market categories. — Amy Sherlock
Tino Sehgal
This Is Exchange

This was the year that Tino Sehgal became known for his 'situations', such as This Is So Contemporary, which required exhibition guards to jump up from their chairs, hop around in loose circles, raise their arms and proclaim the eponymous phrase. Another was This Is Right, which comprised two children replacing the dealers in an art fair booth in order to discuss Sehgal's work. Although less light-hearted, This Is Exchange remains a key work in that it directly expresses Sehgal's desire to find out what constitutes an artwork minus its status as a valuable object (and, famously, minus its documentation in any form).

Participants (or 'interpreters', as Sehgal calls them) approach viewers with the phrase 'this is exchange' and then lure them into a conversation about economics. While it might have initially felt forced, it often lead to a meaningful discussion - and a half-price entrance fee for the visitor if they engaged in the conversation. So, what is the artwork minus its value as an object? In this case, it's an awkward but ultimately rewarding exchange. Numerous younger artists, such as Christian Falsnaes or Isabel Lewis (who is one of Sehgal's regular interpreters), have, without a doubt, taken cues from Sehgal's game-changing work. — Jörg Heiser

Walid Raad
The Atlas Group

The Atlas Group, which ceased operations in 2004, was a research organization founded in 1989 by Walid Raad to document Lebanon's contemporary history. Its focus was the years between 1975–90, when a savage civil war, involving over 20 militias, engulfed the country.

Raad's seminal work, however, was a total fiction. Its contributors were invented intellectuals and anonymous correspondents, while its archive comprised partially found, partially fabricated material. From notebooks documenting the gambling habits of historians to the tale of a spook who abandoned his post on the Corniche Beirut to video the sunset, the archive makes no attempt to present itself as fact. Rather, it speaks of potential histories, of the gestures and emotions (or 'traces', as Raad refers to them) that are often erased by formal accounts as personal stories slip between the facts. Raad may have called time on this particular project, but his dealings with collective memory have inspired a number of Lebanese artists to revisit the archive in order to gain a better understanding of the present. Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, Lamia Joreige, Akram Zaatari: certain traces of The Atlas Group persist. — Harry Thome

1. Andrea Fraser
Little Frank and His Corp., 2001, video still

2. Qin Gao

3. The Atlas Group
Notebook volume 12: Missing Lebanese Wars, 1980/81, pigmented offset print, 34 x 24 cm

Courtesy
1. the artist and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin x 2 Long March Space, Beijing x 3 the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Steen-Søndergaard Gallery, Hamburg and Beirut

Seth Price
Dispersion

Raghurib Singh
A Way into India

Danh Vò
Vo Rosasco Rasmussen

2003

Marc-Camille Chaimowicz
Jean Cocteau...

Enrico David
Spring Session Men

Olafur Eliasson
The Weather Project

Isa Genzken
Empire/Vampire,
Who Kills Death

Wade Guyton
Untitled Printer Drawing

Lucy McKenzie and
Paulina Olowska
Nova Popularna

Anri Sala
Damm i Colori

Rebecca Warren
Homage to R. Crumb,
my Father

2004

Ibon Aranberri
Hydraulic Politics

Cao Fei
A Mirage

Karen Kilimnik
Snow White

2005

Allora & Calzadilla
Under Discussion

Tomma Abts
Veeke

Trisha Donnelly
Gong

Ryan Gander
This Consequence

Pieter Hugo
Gadawan Kura -
The Hyena Men

John Stezaker
Film Portraits

2006

Cory Arcangel
The Year in the Internet

Cosima von Bonin
Relax, It's Only a Ghost
Mike Kelley
*Day Is Done*

In his wide-ranging work and teaching, Mike Kelley created an unsettling, often funny, always empathetic take on American vernacular culture. As art historian John C. Welchman wrote in *frieze*, Kelley — who came from ‘an indelible blue-collar background’ — addressed with ‘honour, the languages and assumptions of education, adolescence, crafts and DIY, holidays, pop psychology, parades and rituals, fandom, newspaper reportage, public address and a thousand other conditions of daily life’. This was, perhaps, best expressed in *Day Is Done*, first shown at Gagosian Gallery, New York, in 2005. Based on a series of found high-school yearbook photographs depicting strange pageants and plays, the installation uses video, music, sculpture and photography to restage these images and explore the psychological space of education, youth and the suburban experience. It was originally conceived as part of his magnum opus, ‘Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstructions’ — a bigger series, which was unfinished when the artist tragically died in 2012. However, it would be hard to overestimate the influence that this work, and others by Kelley, has had on artists in the US and beyond. — Dan Fox

Zanele Muholi
*Faces and Phases*

Zanele Muholi’s *Faces and Phases* is not just a photographic portrait series; it’s an example of what the artist herself calls ‘visual activism’. The collection of over 300 black and white images of black lesbians in South Africa, taken between 2006 and 2014, conveys a political message about conditions in Muholi’s native country and, more specifically, about the artist’s fellow members of the LGBT+ community. The series gives visibility to a group of people that has been marginalized and persecuted; many of whom have been victims of so-called ‘corrective’ rape. It carries on a tradition of apartheid-era photography in South Africa with a political bent, as well as echoing the formal qualities of conceptual photography. But, beyond that, the poses and expressions of Muholi’s subjects — or ‘participants’, as she prefers to call them — suggest an intimacy with the photographer, who celebrates their individuality, making them more than part of a collective document. — Christy Lange
Hito Steyerl

Lovely Andrea

Hito Steyerl's *Lovely Andrea* begins with a male voice-over asking: 'Hito, our trip to Tokyo is almost over. But I still ask myself, what is your film about? It's a good question with a deceptively simple reply: it's about Steyerl going in search of a bondage picture of herself, taken 20 years earlier. That said, along the way, *Lovely Andrea* raises fascinating questions, such as: what connects a deleted scene about New York's Twin Towers featured in the 2001 Hollywood film *Spiderman* with Japanese bondage culture circa 1987? The answer? Both are about censorship and the intricate webs – literal and metaphorical – that tie people up. Eventually, Steyerl finds the photograph and the man who took it; but what she also finds and perfects with *Lovely Andrea* is an upbeat, freethinking, feminist form of filmic essay that ties together pieces of pop culture and bits of social reality into a coherent political argument. Bondage, here, becomes an allegory for how power and exploitation permeate supposedly 'free' societies. It's an approach that has had a tremendous influence on a generation of artists coming of age in the years since 2007 – the years of social media, global crises and hard-won civil rights that are newly under threat. — Jörg Heiser
Ai Weiwei
5.12 Citizens’ Investigation

In May 2008, a 8.0-magnitude earthquake hit Sichuan province, southwest China. 87,000 people were killed or listed as missing, including more than 5,000 schoolchildren. In several places, schools had collapsed while nearby buildings remained standing – leading to allegations of shoddy construction and corruption on the part of local officials. Responding to the government’s silence on the number of student casualties and the victims’ identities, Ai Weiwei launched a citizen investigation into the tragedy. Teams of volunteers, recruited via the artist’s website, visited the school sites, interviewing parents and cross-referencing databases and NGO reports to compile a list of 4,851 names and ages of the dead. These were spread via social media and Ai’s blog – page views of which reached more than 10 million, before it was shut down by the authorities in May 2009. Since the 1990s, as art has increasingly been asked to assess itself in terms of ‘engagement’, activism has become a common artistic response to troubled times. A landmark piece of collaborative journalism, 5.12 Citizens’ Investigation is potent testimony to Ai’s singular ability to galvanize civil society under an oppressive regime and to highlight on the global stage China’s ongoing struggle for democracy. — Amy Sherlock

Teresa Margolles
What Else Could We Talk About

Perhaps one of the most tragic results of the exploitative relationship between this planet’s northern and southern hemispheres has been the Mexican drug war. In 2008 alone, a year before Teresa Margolles represented Mexico at the 53rd Venice Biennale, there were more than 5,000 narco-related murders in the country. What else, indeed, could a Mexican artist focus on for a national pavilion at Venice, other than the cycles of violence, spun ever-faster by the insatiable market for drugs? Margolles – who originally trained in forensic medicine and who has long confronted the subject of death in her work – took pieces of fabric soaked in blood from drug-related crime scenes in Mexico and hung them like flags inside and outside the pavilion. The floors were mopped daily in water and blood from murder victims. Visitors were informed that jewellery made from the shattered windscreen of cars shot to pieces in gun battles was kept in a safe beneath the pavilion. Seven years on, the violence has not abated, nor has the economic exploitation. US politicians use the cartel wars to openly espouse hate rhetoric around immigration. Margolles’s 2009 work – a profound yet straight-talking spin on classic conceptual art – seems like an ever-more relevant response to this appalling conflict. — Dan Fox
Tania Bruguera
Immigrant Movement International

Negar Azimi once disarmed today’s politically engaged art in two sentences: ‘Behold the oil tank in the gallery. Behold the sanguine consumption of art.’ Accurately, she condemns distance, a lack of courage, a dilution of reality.

Cuban artist Tania Bruguera’s Immigrant Movement International – a project-cum-community space that ran from 2010–15, in order to research the relationship between US politics and immigrants – was guilty of none of this. Throughout the first year, Bruguera lived in Queens with 12 immigrants. She survived on a minimum wage with no social security, co-ordinating workshops, English language classes and legal advice for the community.

Political art that claims authority should be questioned, as should those behind it. With Immigrant Movement International, however, Bruguera acted sensitively and ethically, fully admitting the shortcomings of her practice (‘This project has a 99.9999999 percent possibility of being a disaster’) while campaigning for change. She believed in – believes in – art util (useful art): social practice as a reusable tool, not a passing statement.

As we move forward and turn our attention towards the riotous instability that international displacement and transnational terrorism brings, this sentiment is more vital than ever. — Harry Thorne
Ryan Trecartin
Any Ever

The hybrid identities of the internet age are everywhere in Ryan Trecartin’s videos. Layered flows of information emerge as on-screen superimposition and rapid cutting, accompanied by the repetitive, disjointed chatter of bizarre characters who finish each other’s sentences. Fragments of speech appear to hold meaning only to dissipate under the onslaught of further non sequiturs. Topics come in and out of focus—globalization, the sorority, family dynamics. For Trecartin, this refashioning of language beyond reason offers the possibility of new articulations of subjectivity, outside of recognized racial and gender identities. Indeed, his characters belong to an unclassifiable otherness—or, rather, queerness—visually signalled by bodies painted in lurid colours and with constantly shifting vocal registers.

‘Any Ever’, Trecartin’s 2011 show at New York’s MoMA PS1, was the most fully realized of the artist’s video environments to date—mostly made with his frequent collaborator Lizzie Fitch—giving physical form to his potent mixture of the prosaic and the absurd. —Paul Clinton

Ed Atkins
Us Dead Talk Love

A dual-screen installation first shown at London’s Chisenhale Gallery, Ed Atkins’ Us Dead Talk Love is an acutely contemporary meditation on the oldest questions: about how humans relate to one another and to death as the great unknown. Atkins updates Maurice Blanchot’s paradox of the corpse—as the thing that both is and is not the dead person—for the HD-era: the more ‘real’ and minutely detailed the digital image, the more remote and alien the object seems. Us Dead Talk Love features a doubled CGI avatar—a disembodied head that delivers a wonderfully digressive monologue on the possibility of intimacy, occasioned by finding an eyelash under his skin. When the head rolls over we see the dark blankness of its interior: who can ever know what is going on inside another person’s mind? Alongside the work of Atkins’ contemporaries, from Benedict Drew to Laure Prouvost, Us Dead Talk Love represents a new viscerality in digital filmmaking—not only in its abject subject matter, but also in the queasily direct sensory response provoked by its disjunctive montage of sound, image and word.
—Amy Sherlock
Camille Henrot
Grosse Fatigue

Competing, disjunctive and oppositional forces are at work in Camille Henrot’s breakthrough film installation, which first appeared in (and acted, to my mind, as the lodestar for) Massimiliano Gioni’s expansive exhibition for the 56th Venice Biennale, ‘The Encyclopedic Palace’. Synthesising myth and storytelling, science and nature, knowledge and belief, spoken-word poetry and digital-image production, Grosse Fatigue is, in effect, a creation story for the internet age. Layers of desktop images combine with footage shot in the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History and a script compiling varied accounts of the beginning of the world from ancient civilizations. It arrived at a moment when a new interest in evolutionary theory — both in science and philosophy — mixed with a mode of artistic practice favouring ethnographic research, which has now become known as the ‘anthropological turn’. — Paul Teasdale

2013

John Akomfrah
The Stuart Hall Project

Phyllida Barlow
untitled: dock: Shungblocks

Jérôme Bel
Disabled Theater

Aleksandra Domanović
Little Sister

Jon Rafman
Still Life (Betamale)

Rachel Rose
Sitting Feeding Sleeping

2014

Verena Dengler
Dingly Up in Blue

Fritz Haeg
Salmon Creek Farm

Ella Kruglyanskaya
How To Work Together

Renata Lucas
Museum of the Diagonal Man

Park McArthur
Ramps

Cally Spooner
And You Were Wonderful, On Stage

Jordan Wolfson
(Female Figure)

2015

Simon Denny
Secret Power

Anthea Hamilton
Project for Door (After Gaetano Pesce)

Marguerite Humeau
Cleopatra, Synthetic Voice and Incantation

Anne Imhof
DEAL

Rachel Maclean
Feed Me

James Richards
Radio at Night

Anicka Yi
Grabbing at Never Vegetables

Camille Henrot
Grosse Fatigue, 2013, video stills

Courtesy the artist, Sixx Films and kamel mennour, Paris
Pierre Huyghe
Human Mask

The repetition of our working lives, the cycles of nature and the complexity of non-human forms of intelligence and communication have long been central to the French artist Pierre Huyghe’s work. This 19-minute film, Human Mask, was included in his exhibition ‘IN, BORDER, DEEP’ at Hauser & Wirth, London, in 2014. Alongside it were aquariums filled with biotopes transplanted from Claude Monet’s ponds, a sculpture heated to the temperature of the human body, and a video of 30-million-year-old copulating insects preserved in amber. Human Mask was partially shot on a drone camera in post-tsunami Fukushima in 2011. It features a monkey, wearing a wig and a noh-inspired mask, who wanders around an abandoned restaurant like a melancholy, shape-shifting waitress. As climate change ravages the environment and the ethics of our human-centric relationship with other species is increasingly questioned, Huyghe’s film is a hallucinogenic lament for a ravaged past and a grim future – one that will only be saved if we insist on new ways of interacting with the planet. — Jennifer Higgle

Martine Syms
Notes on Gesture

Hands speak the same language everywhere: this is the premise of the 17th-century treatise, Chirologia: Or the Natural Language of the Hand, which is a touchstone for Martine Syms’s Notes on Gesture. Only they don’t, really: hands have their own dialects, their own vernacular. In this ten-minute film, composed of jerky looping memes, Syms and her collaborator, the artist Diamond Stingily, catalogue a specific, immediately recognizable, vocabulary of braid-flicks, pouts and dance moves that pertain to African-American women: ‘famous women, infamous women and unknown women’, as the artist says. Tweaking a famous quip by US comedian Paul Mooney, the sentiment underpinning Notes on Gesture is: ‘Everyone wanna be a black woman but no-one wanna be a black woman.’ Meaning: everybody wants to shake it like Beyoncé, but who wants to be amongst the 25 percent of black women in the US living in poverty? Notes on Gesture shows Mooney’s taut should-we-laugh/shouldn’t-we-laugh humour at a moment in which the symbolism of black hands – raised in a Black Power salute or in the air on police request – has rarely been more charged. — Amy Sherlock
Talk of shores, borders and the purity of language immediately brings to mind pressing global issues around nationalism and immigration. For his South London Gallery show earlier this year, ‘Sic Glyphs’, Michael Dean blocked the entrance to the gallery with chipboard and corrugated iron and filled the room with twisted forms in steel rebar, concrete and plastic, which sprouted dry weeds, reminiscent of an abandoned industrial estate or dockland. These sculptures, suggesting either human figures with peephole eyes, clenched fists, lolling tongues or cursive script, tracked the migration of language from speech to writing to the glyph and then into three dimensions. In this way, he drew attention to the fundamental instability of meaning – language, so central to identity, belongs to nobody and settles nowhere. Dean really did conjure some ‘sic glyphs’ – cool signs – with work that felt playful and politically urgent. – Paul Clinton is associate editor of Frieze and lives in London, UK.

In a climate of revanchist populism and social upheaval, Nicole Eisenman’s paintings, recently exhibited in a retrospective at the New Museum and a solo show at Anton Kern Gallery in New York, are celebrations of racial, sexual and gender difference. Eisenman’s figurative painting demonstrates how now, more than ever, we need to see diverse bodies represented in our visual culture. – Dan Fox is co-editor of Frieze and lives in New York, USA.

Mary Reid Kelley’s latest film, This is Official (2016), is set in a morgue; it tells the tale of a woman, who committed suicide, and her animated organs, in rhymed dialogue. It’s Shana Moulton-funny, Jim Shaw-awkward and Tim Burton-haunting.

Hiwa K is a Berlin-based artist who originates from the northern-Iraqi, Kurdish town of Sulaymaniya. Via videos, sculptures, installations and performative works, he reflects on the recent history of war and trauma in the Middle East with musical humour and conceptual acuity. – Torg Heiser is co-editor of Frieze and lives in Berlin, Germany.

Jeremy Deller’s We Are Here (2016) – a one-day living memorial across the UK to the young lives lost at the Battle of the Somme 100 years ago – was an almost unbearably moving tribute to a slaughtered generation. The depth and scope of Deller’s creative activism shows no sign of abating. A different approach to the past, but no less moving: the young painter, Helen Johnson, creates urgent, beautiful canvases that intertwine Australian history with an hallucinogenic imagining of the present. Her exhibition, as part of Glasgow International earlier this year, was incredible: I can’t wait to see what she comes up with next. – Jennifer Higgit is co-editor of Frieze and editor of Frieze Masters. She lives in London, UK.

The US filmmaker Laura Poitras’s documentary work about the Iraq War, surveillance and the importance of whistleblowers has never been more necessary. Her trilogy on post 9/11 politics – My Country, My Country (2006), The Oath (2010) and CITIZENFOUR (2014) – traces the most significant political developments of our century with both a journalistic immediacy and an intimate, humanizing lens. I am looking forward to her forthcoming film, Risk: a portrait of Wikileaks, Julian Assange, various journalists and activists. – Christy Lange is curator of public programming and associate editor of Frieze. She lives in Berlin, Germany.

Josh Kline’s immersive, dystopian installations, incorporating video and sculpture, examine the intersection between digital technology, politics and labour. Freedom (2015) – which was first seen in New York as part of last year’s New Museum Triennial, and is currently on view at the Portland Art Museum – combines references to Occupy Wall Street, Barack Obama’s inaugural address, the Iraq War and police killings to highlight the loss of our collective freedoms in the face of growing state and corporate surveillance. In his show at 47 Canal in New York earlier this year, Kline used an innovative range of materials to address income inequality: one of the most significant social and political issues of our time. – Evan Moffitt is assistant editor of Frieze and lives in New York, USA.

Lucy Beech’s Pharmakon, co-commissioned by this year’s Liverpool Biennial and FACT, deepens the artist’s exploration of ‘emotional entrepreneurship’, particularly as it relates to female empowerment and its fictions, and the ways in which networks of dependency and support are configured by late capitalism. Pharmakon is an incisive, absolutely contemporary film that feels more relevant than ever in Britain, where “our” NHS is continually and insidiously used as a political currency – and one all the more pleasing for its, perhaps unwitting, invocation of Roald Dahl’s The Witches (1983). – Amy Sherlock is deputy editor of Frieze and lives in London, UK.

In London in January, I saw Mariana Simnett’s first solo show at Seventeen. Her immersive installation, Faint with Light (2016), included a recording of the artist fainting from self-induced hyperventilation – she is interested in the involuntary sound emitted by the body at the moment of unconsciousness – while a rack of strip lights projects a slowly accelerating strobe pattern. For those that know her films, such visceral intensity will not be a surprise; to experience it was something else altogether. – Paul Teasdale is editor of frieze.com and lives in London, UK.

It was a simple action – or, perhaps, inaction – but its repercussions were staggering. By closing Chisenhale Gallery for just over a month, and insisting its employees not work, the German artist Maria Eichhorn provoked more confusion, vitriol and debate than any other artist this year. Five Weeks, 25 Days, 175 Hours is a testament to the alluring significance of the conceptual; a testament to the importance of doing things a little differently. – Harry Thorne is assistant digital editor of Frieze and lives in London, UK.