

Andrew Russeth, “Eyegays, Ecstatic Painting, and a Glorious Mess: Andrew Russeth on the Year In, and Beyond, the Galleries,” *ArtNews*, December 30, 2014.

# ARTNEWS

## Eyegays, Ecstatic Painting, and a Glorious Mess: Andrew Russeth on the Year In, and Beyond, the Galleries

by Andrew Russeth



It is not an easy time to be making and showing art in New York. Rents—for apartments, for studios, and for galleries, in seemingly every neighborhood—are climbing fast, too many jobs are tenuous, and ultra-blue-chip dealers are expanding their often-deadening influence. And yet, against long odds, there were displays of energy and nerve from artists and galleries, young and old, big and small, all over the place in 2014.

One of the most thrilling events of the year occurred just two weeks ago: the triumphant arrival in front of the Lower

East Side’s new Tomorrow Gallery of a battle ax of an RV that is the home and gallery (called Bed-Stuy Love Affair) of artist Jared Madere. Painted black, with bulky metal gates chained to its windows, it does not look remotely roadworthy, but Madere made it all the way from New York to Miami and back in it, after gutting its interior and loading it with art (and a bed). At Tomorrow and in the RV he has organized, with L.A.’s Bobby Jesus, a glorious mess of a show stocked with young artists, among them Jeffrey Joyal, Bradley Kronz, and Rochelle Goldberg, who installed an explosive ceramic sculpture in the RV’s toilet.

That kind of renegade, DIY approach is rare in today’s super-professionalized art industry, but it is out there, and 2014 saw some other fine examples. Take, for instance, the Hot House show that Brooklyn’s Know More Games gallery, Black Rock White Rock, and Los Angeles’s Night Gallery organized in a gently dilapidated building in East Harlem during Frieze New York in May. It was packed with exciting work by the likes of Samara Golden, Sam Anderson, and Mira Dancy. There are also all the podcasts and radio stations that have popped up recently, like artist Anicka Yi’s Lonely Samurai and Souleseek, another KNG project. (Disclosure: I appeared on both. Also, Travis Diehl has a nice bicoastal look at the turn toward radio, on *Artforum*’s website.)

These projects weren’t just about art programming. They also served as venues for communities to coalesce and debates to take place. A case in point: the fascinating, sometimes-contentious back-and-forth on Souleseek between a team of questioners and Jordan Wolfson, whose show at David Zwirner in March, with its

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grimy animatronic singer, was as ingenious as it was discomfiting. This much is clear: Wolfson is going to terrorize us all for decades to come.

The nadir of 2014, as almost everyone seems to agree (with the exception of a few vested parties), was the unending proliferation of wan abstraction, or zombie formalism, as it's been called. But don't throw out the baby with the bathwater. Some of the year's best shows in New York were rich with abstract paintings. Dona Nelson showed captivating melees of paint and string on freestanding canvas and cheesecloth at Thomas Erben, and was one of the highlights of a lackluster Whitney Biennial. Heather Guertin couched quiet, clever narratives—about art history, painting, and comedy—in buoyant abstractions at Interstate and Brennan & Griffin. Sarah Crowner's sewn-together numbers got even punchier, at Nichelle Beauchene; her upcoming debut at Casey Kaplan will be one of next year's most closely watched shows in the city. At Showroom in Gowanus, Lauren Luloff honed her toothsome, airy collages of fabric and paint—deceptively breezy, they're undergirded with darkness. Uptown, at Tilton Gallery, the ecstatic paintings of Abstract-Expressionist Ed Clark, who is still delivering the goods at 88, were elegantly displayed in a show organized by David Hammons, who himself delivered a tour de force at White Cube in London.

While we're talking painting, it was also a strong year for the figurative variety, with Albert York and Michel Majerus getting the deluxe posthumous treatment at Matthew Marks, Gina Beavers pushing her meaty, taste-destroying élan even further at Clifton Benevento, Dave Miko and Ned Vena showing large-scale, almost-too-good-to-be-true graffiti paintings at Albus Greenspon, Miko offering up a sumptuous new batch of Immendorf-flavored creations at Real Fine Arts, Avery Singer making a breakout appearance with incisive black-and-white computer-graphics-style paintings in the hardest of all venues, a booth at the Frieze New York fair, Ridley Howard assembling a new suite of his eerie, sexy portraits at Koenig & Clinton, and Austin Lee filling Postmasters with hazy, cartoony paintings that straddled the analog-digital divide effortlessly and with a nice helping of humor.

Other highlights from the year in New York, all across the spectrum: a jam-packed show of ferocious, sometimes-frightening metal assemblages from Melvin Edwards at Alexander Gray Associates; Nancy Grossman's take-no-prisoners, bondage-heavy assemblages at Michael Rosenfeld; Jory Rabinovitz's sculptures at Martos, which crossbred Franz West and Claes Oldenburg with the U.S. Mint, everything Darren Bader did, at Andrew Kreps, Frieze London, and Miami Basel (how long can he keep his man-on-a-wire streak going?); the blowout group show that Sam Gordon organized this summer at Andrew Edlin, "Purple States," which paired outré-minded insiders and their self-taught favorites; Matt Hoyt's latest sculptures at the new 47 Canal space, and the recreation of Stockhausen's 1964 *Originale* happening at the Kitchen, which had all sorts of artists (from Rachel Mason to Joan Jonas), doing their thing throughout the room, providing a microcosm of the frenetic energy that makes New York so overwhelming, and so great.