



Artsy Editors, "The Year in Visual Culture," *Artsy*, Dec 22, 2017.

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The Year in Visual Culture

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What, exactly, is visual culture? In a world where we communicate increasingly with images, it's an ever-expanding field, comprising not just art, photography, and design, but also memes, advertising, histories of representation, and the very technologies through which all this flows. In 2017, visual culture spanned from Arthur Jafa's efforts to create an archive of the black aesthetic to Jenny Holzer's "Truisms" becoming a calling card for the #metoo movement. It meant collector Yusaku Maezawa crowning Basquiat as America's most expensive artist and Agnes Gund using art to help spark prison reform. But it also meant the pussyhat, the ubiquity of the Memphis Group, and incredible technical advances like augmented reality's newest release, Magic Leap One. Here, Artsy's editors select the 25 individuals who had the biggest impact in changing the visual landscape this year.



Awol Erizku

Broke the record for Instagram's most-liked photo with an image that powerfully challenges the predominantly white narratives of art history

In February, Beyoncé posted a portrait of herself on Instagram to announce to the world that she was expecting twins. The photograph pictures the cultural icon donning a veil and clutching her belly in a way that recalls the Virgin Mary. Within hours, it became the platform's most popular post of all time, clocking more than 7.2 million likes the first day it was published.



Shared on the first day of Black History Month, the photograph was taken by 29-year-old artist Erizku, who has long rewritten Western art history through his work to include people of color. For one series, Erizku traveled to his birthplace of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to capture photographs that depict female sex workers reclining in the style of paintings like Édouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863). This year, at Ben Brown Fine Arts in London, he mounted a solo exhibition titled “Make America Great Again”; and at Night Gallery in Los Angeles, he presented a body of work using imagery sourced from a rejected 1968 Black Panther coloring book to explore institutionalized racism and police brutality in the United States.

Erizku's art has penetrated the prevailing but not always particularly substantive realm of popular culture: His photograph of Beyoncé unseated a Selena Gomez selfie in which she was sipping Coca-Cola from a straw as Instagram's most popular image. That title was also previously held by a Kendall Jenner selfie in which her hair had been arranged to resemble a series of hearts. Erizku's photograph's popularity coincided with a 78-percent increase in the use of the “photography” hashtag on Instagram this year, according to data provided by the platform. And the fact that an artwork—never mind one that tackles racial bias during a time when the United States is undergoing a significant reckoning over institutionalized racism—can now reach more people in a day than the number who attend the Louvre in a year marks a major milestone in the history of visual culture.