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Critic's picks: Top 10 DFW-area visual art exhibits in 2014

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The local art scene in 2014 was richly rewarding, experimental, collaborative, global in scope and history, and loudly defended. Sounds fractious, but it was all good. Here is short list of the most rewarding efforts, in order of preference.

1. 'David Bates'

February-May, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas

A 40-year retrospective of the very talented Dallas-based artist was mounted in two museums simultaneously. The paintings were at the Modern, the sculpture at the Nasher. It was the first collaborative effort by the two institutions, and the result was spectacular. The synchronicity benefited the institutions, the audience and the charming Mr. Bates.

2. 'Faces of Impressionism: Portraits From the Musée d'Orsay'

On exhibit through Jan. 25, 2015, Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth

This exhibit follows the development of the portrait in French painting from the mid-19th century through the first years of the 20th century, including the shining lights of impressionism — Caillebotte, Cezanne, Degas, Monet, Renoir — and the artists who followed them, such as Gauguin, van Gogh, Seurat, Signac and Toulouse-Lautrec.

It's a magnificent collection of paintings and a few sculptures from the greats of 100 to 150 years ago. www.kimbellart.org.



3. 'Provocations: The Architecture and Design of Heatherwick Studio'

On exhibition through Jan. 4, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas

This one highlights the wonderfully inventive creations of British designer Thomas Heatherwick, such as bridges, buildings, furniture, buses, national pavilions and the Olympic torch and how they came to be.
It's an exhibition framed by the design challenge and the way the studio designers answered the challenge. Their results are breathtaking in their originality.

Prototypes, large scale models and extensive photography represent the built environments. It takes time, patience and careful attention to the gallery texts to understand the scope of many of the projects, but the return is worth it. www.nashersculpturecenter.org.

4. 'Urban Theater: New York Art in the 1980s'

Through Jan. 4, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

It was a time of upheaval in the New York art scene, and those who were there never let you forget it. It was seminal and crazy. Chief curator Michael Auping viewed it from a safe distance and compiled this

exhibit, which has been dissed for not having every art *cause celebre* of the decade, but that's another show.

This is raunchy enough and illustrates how art bubbled up from the subway tunnels and the late-night club scene to find its way into the galleries, and now, onto the auction block. www.themodern.org.

5. 'Art and Appetite: American Painting, Culture, and Cuisine'

February-May, Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth

A celebration of food and the way it contextualizes so many cultural experiences, the exhibit was a gastronomical journey and history lesson of the United States that touched on politics, race, class, gender and commerce. It was told through beloved artworks such as Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*, from 1942; Norman Rockwell's *Freedom From Want*, also from 1942; and Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup*, from 1965.

6. 'West' and 'El Paseo'

Running concurrently through Jan. 31 at Artspace111, Fort Worth

Two of Fort Worth's best artists [are showing at the same time at local gallery Artspace111](#).

Photographer Jill Johnson, who grew up surrounded by the vast nothingness of West Texas, finds beauty in the bleak. James Malone, a transplant from northern New York, has made a career of documentary drawings of the most inhospitable place in Texas, Big Bend, and making it look like the most gloriously exotic otherworld.

What attracts them is an essence of the Wild West, the same force that keeps the rest of us tethered to the sidewalks in the city. www.artspace111.com.

7. 'Samurai: Armour From the Ann and Gabriel Barbier-Mueller Collection'

February-August, Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth

The regalia of the Japanese warriors was so fine and fancy, it is no wonder that the Japanese film canon is heavy with the samurais' daring. Their kit was extraordinarily fearsome and exquisitely beautiful. This exhibit, which had many full samurai suits and scores of helmets, tells the history of the warriors through craftsmanship. An unusual display that was all the more fascinating for its rarity.

8. 'Bouquets: French Still-Life Painting From Chardin to Matisse'

Through Feb. 8 at the Dallas Museum of Art

This is the first American survey of 19th-century French floral still lifes. In conjunction with the Kimbell exhibition of portraits from approximately the same era, the two exhibits provide an abundance of lovely French art that will be ensconced for the next several weeks. www.dma.org.

9. 'Fast Forward: Contemporary Art From the Emirates'

October-November at Artspace111, Fort Worth

More than 50 paintings, photographs, sculptures and video installations by 25 Emirate artists were brought to Fort Worth as a cultural hands-across-the-sands gesture. The exhibit, which will travel the

United States, was heavy on old traditions being trammelled by new technology and rampant capitalism. Sort of like the U.S. a couple of generations ago.

It proved to be a profound wake-up call. Just imagine how hard it must be to live in this fast-track world with parents and grandparents who partied like it was 1700.

10. 'Meet Me at the Trinity: Photographs by Terry Evans'

Through Jan. 25, Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth

The Carter mounted this exhibit of photographs concurrent with the exhibit "[Navigating the West: George Caleb Bingham and the River](#)" to offer its visitors "an opportunity to think about our local river in the context of Bingham's 19th century work." That didn't happen. What the visitors noticed was how much they disliked Evans' depiction of the Trinity River. [A heated dialogue ensued.](#)

Who knew this seemingly innocuous photography display could generate so much vitriol? It has been wonderful to see such a passionate response. All too often exhibitions open and close without so much as a whisper of dissent. Not this time. www.cartermuseum.org.