

The New York Times

The Best Art of 2017

By Roberta Smith, Holland Cotter and Jason Farago — December 6, 2017



Foreground, Cedrick Tamasala's "How My Grandfather Survived" (2015), along with other sculptures created by Congolese artists and cast in chocolate, at the SculptureCenter in Queens. Credit: Joshua Bright for The New York Times

The art critics of The New York Times Roberta Smith, Holland Cotter and Jason Farago share their picks for the best art of the year

Jason Farago

This was a year of outrage: outrage at injustices beyond the art world, but too often misdirected inward. Disputes over aesthetics and politics frequently devolved — thanks to the accelerant of social media — into shaming and outright censoriousness. Building a better future, together, is going to be arduous work that will require the intelligence, the ambition, and, above all, the seriousness shown by exhibitions like these.

1. **CERCLE D'ART DES TRAVAILLEURS DE PLANTATION CONGOLAISE** As matters of identity and inequality roiled so many American museums, the small, vital **SculptureCenter** in Queens mounted a resounding defense of both cross-cultural partnership and moral sincerity. The sculptors of this collective work on a rural Congolese cacao plantation; their solid, clever statues are 3-D-scanned by a Dutch team, cast in chocolate in Europe and then shown and sold in galleries they will never be able to see. The museum's prestige helps these sculptures obtain high prices, which has made a concrete improvement to these artists' lives, but the works' true value, both economically and culturally, as chocolate and as art, depends on global disparities that no exhibition can remedy. This was the most challenging show of the year, and proudly "problematic," but that was the point: You need to be fearless, and run right into the swamp of possible misunderstanding, to have any hope of making a difference.