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Controversy Grips Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis as Chief Curator Exits—and the 9 Other Biggest News Stories This Week



Catch up on the latest art news with our rundown of the 10 stories you need to know this week.

ARTSY EDITORIAL

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01 Jeffrey Uslip, chief curator of the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, is leaving his post after an exhibition he curated was broadly criticized for being exploitative and racially insensitive.

(via St. Louis Post-Dispatch)

Since opening in mid-September at CAM, a solo exhibition of white male artist Kelley Walker has been under fire over a series of works that appropriate images from the Civil Rights Movement and magazine covers of black women streaked with toothpaste and chocolate. After failing to offer adequate explanation for the works during an artist talk at the museum on September 17, both Walker and Uslip—who is said to have had a crucial role in realizing the exhibition—incited criticism from the local community, who found the works malicious in nature. A September 18th letter called for the removal of four offending works; among signees were three black members of the CAM staff. The museum refused to remove the works, and instead added barrier walls and signage to warn museum-goers that Walker's works “may be difficult for some viewers.” Local artist Damon Davis explained that the works are particularly insensitive, pointing to “the current climate of race in St. Louis—knowing this is the epicenter of this new incarnation of the Civil Rights Movement,” he said. Last week, over 20 artists withdrew from a museum-sponsored open studios tour. Uslip is said to be moving on to a position at another museum. In a statement, CAM executive director Lisa Melandri said, “This is a pivotal time for the museum and for our community, as we examine museum and curatorial best practices and apply those to everything we do at CAM. We look forward to our future.”

02 China's famous terracotta army may have been inspired by ancient Greek sculptures, suggesting that

Asian and European civilizations were well-connected much earlier than previously thought.

(via *The Guardian*)

According to a team of archeologists and historians working on the site, the lifelike design of the 8,000 terracotta warrior figures guarding the tomb of the first Chinese emperor may indicate the existence of ancient Greek sculptures in China, and perhaps the arrival of Greek sculptors who trained locals at the site. The figures of the terracotta army, discovered in Xi'an in 1974, feature intricate detailing of their hairstyles and armour, a difference from earlier sculpted figures. Now, there is reason to believe this is partly due to the influence of Greek artisans. "We now have evidence that close contact existed between the first emperor's China and the west before the formal opening of the Silk Road," said Li Xiuzhen, senior archaeologist at the site. "This is far earlier than we formerly thought." Evidence includes recent findings of ancient European DNA contemporaneous with the time of the first emperor in various locations in Xinjian province. Her team's discovery will be featured in a BBC and National Geographic co-produced documentary, *The Greatest Tomb on Earth*, airing this October.

03 The exam board that administers art history tests to British high school students will cease to offer the subject after 2018, a decision that has prompted fury and outrage across the arts community.

(via *The Guardian*)

High school students in 2018 will be the last to be offered a General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (or A-level) in art history. Though the announcement Wednesday took many by surprise, former U.K. education secretary Michael Gove (who served between 2010 and 2014) began the process of eliminating A-level exams in "soft" subjects years earlier. The Association of Art Historians offered a harsh critique, noting that removing the exam means fewer students will be exposed to the subject before they head to university. "The loss of that A-level means that for many prospective students of the subject that door will close and future opportunities [will be] lost," they said in a statement. But the exam board, AQA, noted that only 839 students took the exam this summer, a number that may continue to decline with only a few state-run schools offering the subject. "Our decision has nothing to do with the importance of the history of art, and it won't stop students going on to do a degree in it as we're not aware of any universities that require an A-level in the subject," an AQA spokesperson said.

04 Christie's will open the doors of its flagship space in Beijing on Saturday, bringing the number of the auction house's permanent locations in China to three.

(via *Christie's*)

The space will span 8,600 square feet over three floors, including areas for exhibitions, offices, and events. The press release does not clarify whether the new location will feature a salesroom for auctions, however. For its first exhibition, the flagship space will host a series of Picasso works that explore his influence on Chinese artists, including Sanyu and Zeng Fanzhi. These Beijing offices will serve as the second mainland location for Christie's, the first of which opened in Shanghai in 2014. Its timeline trailed that of Sotheby's by several years, however—the rival auction house was approved as the first foreign company to legally sell art and collectibles in China in 2012 and held its first mainland auction the next year. This Chinese expansion demonstrates a commitment to the region's growing collector base. Despite a 23% contraction in the country's art market in 2015, the country has seen robust growth so far in 2016. Through the first two quarters of the year, China surpassed the United States in auction turnover, rising to the top of the art auction market. Part of this is due to a market contraction in historic auction hubs like New York and London, but the result is impressive nonetheless, particularly given the turbulent economic climate in China. Likely, Christie's is hoping to further cultivate the wealthy collector base present in the country's mainland that is driving the art market's growth.

05 In the latest of a long string of Jackson Pollock authentication controversies, a prominent L.A. lawyer has launched a lawsuit over a “\$100 million” painting that he believes to be a work by the Abstract Expressionist master.

(via the *L.A. Times*)

In the recent suit, Hollywood litigator Pierce O'Donnell is accusing Maitreya Kadre, an art advisor and New Age spiritualist with whom he owns a canvas purportedly painted by Pollock, of blocking the authentication and sale of the piece. O'Donnell and Kadre jointly purchased the painting, titled *Pink Spring*, in 2011 as an investment. However the partnership turned sour, as the suit alleges, when O'Donnell's attempts to access the piece, said to be worth upwards of \$100 million if authenticated, were repeatedly thwarted by Kadre. O'Donnell, who owns a 30% stake in *Pink Spring* and claims to have paid over \$200,000 for his share, believes that the painting's authenticity can be confirmed by a note scrawled on the back of the work that matches the handwriting of Lee Krasner, Pollock's wife. But formal authentication is

key in the sale of a work by Pollock, whose market has been muddied in recent years by fakes made famous by the notorious Knoedler & Co. gallery case (a situation complicated by the fact that the Pollock-Krasner Foundation stopped authenticating the artist's works in 1996). Kadre has yet to publicly respond to the suit over the mysterious painting, which has raised more questions than answers around the piece's provenance, its pending authentication, and its valuation.

06 Art dealer, curator, and writer Klaus Kertess, whose Bykert Gallery helped launch the careers of artists Brice Marden and Chuck Close, has died at age 76.

(via *ARTnews*)

From his early days in the art world in the 1960s, Kertess promoted young artists involved in Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, and Process Art at a time when there were few opportunities for them to break into the gallery scene. Many of the artists who showed at his Bykert Gallery—including Brice Marden, Alan Saret, Barry Le Va, and Dorothea Rockburne—went on to make their mark on the art-historical canon. In 1968, Bykert was named “Gallery of the Year” by critic Rosalind Constable in *New York* magazine. Leaving Bykert in 1975, Kertess served as curator of the Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill, New York, from 1983–89 and as adjunct curator of drawing at the Whitney Museum. As the curator of the 1995 Whitney Biennial, he featured a mix of established artists, like Richard Serra, Agnes Martin, and Cy Twombly, and emerging, younger artists, like Nicole Eisenman and Stan Douglas. Kertess's biennial broke away from the political themes of the previous edition and instead presented art as a “platform for experience... in which meaning is embedded in formal value.” Throughout his career he also organized the first exhibition at Detroit's Museum of Contemporary Art, curated shows on Willem de Kooning and John O'Reilly, and wrote numerous monographs and pieces for publications such as *Artforum* and *Art in America*.

07 On Monday, activist program Decolonize This Place staged an Anti-Columbus Day tour and protest at New York's American Museum of Natural History, calling for public institutions to actively address their legacies of colonialism.

(via *Hyperallergic*)

Over 200 people gathered in the museum's Hall of Asian Mammals for the tour, which included 10 stops in spaces pointing to the museum's problematic past and the role the museum plays in perpetuating

problematic histories. Attendees included members of Black Lives Matter, Indigenous rights organizations, and other social and labor activist groups. Following the tour, the group staged a protest outside to remove the 1939 statue that depicts Theodore Roosevelt (considered one of the most racist U.S. presidents) on horseback flanked by an African-American and a Native-American man. Meanwhile, across Central Park at the Guggenheim Museum, an activist stuck a “Decolonize This Place” sticker on Maurizio Cattelan’s gold toilet, titled *America* (2016). The protester, who asked to remain anonymous, told *Hyperallergic* that “social activism as art, if worth it’s [sic] weight in gold, can redefine what stands or falls to be culturally significant.” As part of a growing nationwide movement to rename the controversial holiday, Decolonize This Place also penned an “Open Letter on Indigenous Peoples’ Day, 2106” to Mayor de Blasio, the city council, and the trustees of AMNH. “Many American cities have bowed to the obvious and renamed Columbus Day as Indigenous Peoples’ Day,” it begins. “Why is New York not among them?” AMNH has not yet issued a formal response.

08 Four employees have confessed to selling fake entrance tickets to the Château of Versailles, a scheme that estimates say cost the site €250,000 in roughly two months.

(via *The Art Newspaper*)

The group of individuals, aged from 21 to 34, were arrested last Sunday when other workers noticed that some tickets were not being inserted into the machines at the entrance. A manager called the police, who rounded up the culprits, one of whom was carrying 150 fake tickets on his person. Although four employees have admitted to their participation in the crime, there is a fifth worker thought to be the ringleader who has denied all responsibility thus far. Allegedly, the scheme involved two types of tickets: recycled real tickets and counterfeit tickets. These were sold at a discounted price of €10 to tourists who paid in cash. Although the estimated damages of €250,000 assume that the plan was put into effect in August, investigators will be double-checking the books for the entire 2016 calendar year to ensure no further criminal activity occurred. France’s cultural institutions have dealt with other ticketing issues in recent years—in 2013, the Louvre uncovered a rash of foreign tourists attempting to use imitation tickets, and in 2010, Marseille’s museums were the victim of a double-ticketing scheme.

09 Just after the National Museum of Beirut opened for the first time since the Lebanese civil war, architect Hala Wardé was announced as lead architect for the city’s new modern art museum,

which will open its first exhibition in 2020.

(via *The Guardian* and *The Art Newspaper*)

On Thursday, Lebanese architect Wardé, with his Paris-based firm HW Architecture, was announced as the winner of a competition to design the forthcoming Beirut Museum of Art (BeMA). HW's proposed museum complex sits on the Green Line, a once-dangerous part of the city that divided the city during the Lebanese civil war (1975–90), and faces the National Museum of Beirut, which inaugurated its basement galleries on October 7th, after suffering serious damage during the war and remaining closed for four decades. Nearby, the centerpiece of Wardé's BeMA—which is inspired by both Islamic minarets and Italian campaniles—will be a 124-meter-tall tower. Lebanon's ministry of culture has gathered some 2,300 works—spanning the early 20th century through 2015, and including works by 470 Lebanese artists—from which BeMA's 1,000-work-strong permanent collection will be chosen, and put on display on the first three floors of the tower. The announcement this Thursday of HW as the winning architecture firm follows the launch of a funding campaign launched in February of 2015.

10 In their closing arguments, prosecutors in the trial of Guy Wildenstein asked the Paris court to sentence the billionaire art dealer to four years in prison and impose a fine of \$276 million.

(via *Bloomberg*)

RELATED ARTICLE



The Criminal Case against Billionaire Dealer Guy Wildenstein, Explained

Prosecutor Monica d'Onofrio called for the punishment Thursday as she concluded the presentation of their case, arguing that “this is the most sophisticated tax fraud” the country has witnessed in decades. The prosecutor also requested a suspension of two of the four years of Wildenstein's sentence (meaning he won't have to spend them in prison) and lighter sentences for the other individuals also charged as part of the investigation. In the complex case, Wildenstein—who normally presides over Wildenstein & Co. from the company's luxurious headquarters on Manhattan's Upper East Side—is accused of failing to disclose and pay taxes on the full amount of the inheritance he received after his father's death in 2001. Lawyers for Wildenstein deny the charges and are set to mount their defense in the coming days of the trial, which is slated to conclude on October 20th. The case is part gossip factory, dredging up stories of glitzy displays of wealth, family betrayals, and a friendship with former French president Nicolas Sarkozy. But more importantly, it offers a

rare glimpse into the complex financial arrangements and freeports used by some wealthy art-owning individuals to shield themselves from tax laws.

—Artsy Editors

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