

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

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Highlights 2013 – Carmen Winant

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'Blues for Smoke'

This Bennett Simpson-curated exhibition, which considered the ethos and aesthetics of blues music through the lens of contemporary art, did what so few other group shows venture: have a palpable thesis, however complicated and contradictory (the 48-artist exhibition opened with a monitor playing Richard Pryor's 1979 *Live in Concert*; both the cutting racial jokes and the staccato delivery set the tone for the surrounding work). More group shows should follow this example, challenging the art and the viewers to confront, conform, reject, or otherwise be informed by an idea that stakes a real, if risky, claim in the world. The best artists have opinions and the best curators should too.

Doris Lessing

There has been a resurgence of interest in Doris Lessing occasioned by her death this year. I'm glad because she is vivid and skeptical and fearless.

Wayne Koestenbaum's *My 1980s* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2013)

In this collection of essays written over the past decade, Koestenbaum continues to stretch the limits of criticism. He deals in human subjects more than topics, and in this book they include Susan Sontag, Frank O'Hara, Lana Turner, Brigitte Bardot, Cary Grant, Roberto Bolaño and Debbie Harry, among others. Koestenbaum loves the concept of celebrity, though mostly as site through which to channel our simultaneous desires for attention, privacy and humiliation (a WK favorite). Even more importantly, Koestenbaum challenges the relationship between criticism and art – or, rather, the manner in which we so linearly use one to read the other – by bleeding together creative, esoteric, diaristic, and academic forms. (Zadie Smith is the only other essay writer that I can think of working in this elastic mode at the moment.) He takes big risks, and occasionally the center doesn't hold. For the most part, Koestenbaum, who is also a painter, asks that his writing behave like visual art rather than describe it.

Some bigger names

I'm not breaking the mold here. Ad Reinhardt at David Zwirner, Ed Ruscha at Gagosian, John Divola at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art and Janet Cardiff at The Cloisters were all outstanding. Some were even moving.

Some younger artists

The work of several artists stayed with me this year. Each person really deserves their own category but I'll collapse them here for the sake of space: Carey Denniston and Strauss Borque-LaFrance at KANSAS, Mike Womack at ZieherSmith, Becky Suss at Fleisher Ollman Gallery, **Brock Enright at Kate Werble Gallery**, Ander Mikalson at Temple Contemporary, Sarah Mattes at Bull & Ram, Chris Domenick, Milano Chow, Julia Bland and Michael Berryhill at Vox Populi, Ofer Wolberger at Printed Matter, Ryan Mrozowski at Pierogi, Zarouhie Abdalian at the MATRIX gallery in the Berkeley Art Museum.

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