

The top 10 art museum exhibitions of 2016, plus the worst trend of the year

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In chronological order of their opening, these were the 10 most engaging art museum exhibitions that I saw this year within L.A.'s immediate orbit. Three are still on view.

[“Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College, 1933-1957,”](#) UCLA Hammer Museum

For a generation of young artists flanking World War II, tiny Black Mountain College in rural North Carolina would become the prime incubator of America's avant-garde culture.

[“Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Medium,”](#) J. Paul Getty Museum and Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989) has gone from being an American pariah to America's sweetheart, a result of his dogged determination to close the long-enforced gap between photography and art that this sprawling two-museum show exposed.

[“Making Waves: Japanese American Photography, 1920-1940,”](#) Japanese American National Museum

The shameful World War II internment nearly erased the extraordinary Modernist legacy of Japanese American photographers, working primarily but not exclusively in L.A., which this long-awaited exhibition beautifully restored.

[“Agnes Martin,”](#) Los Angeles County Museum of Art

In gently crafted, stripped-down Minimalist canvases, Agnes Martin (1912-2004) created an entirely distinct, largely unprecedented artistic vocabulary for spiritual consciousness.

[“Marilyn Minter: Pretty/Dirty,” Orange County Museum of Art](#)

In the 1980s, Marilyn Minter’s visually exhausting paintings and video projections began to shuttle between lusty, orgiastic cravings and the poignancy of inevitable human loss.

[“Non-fiction,” The Underground Museum](#)

With just 10 works by eight artists, the small storefront museum managed to relate a powerful story on the theme of violence against African Americans, both flagrant and subtle. On view through May.

[“Peter Krasnow: Maverick Modernist,” Laguna Art Museum](#)

After the trauma of World War II, Peter Krasnow (1886-1979) made paintings driven by fierce color — abstractions that, in the face of death, rejoice in life.

[“Unruly Nature: The Landscapes of Theodore Rousseau,” J. Paul Getty Museum](#)

In the landscapes paintings of Theodore Rousseau (1812-1867), seen in his first American retrospective, nationalism met naturalism and French identity fused with the land.

[“John McLaughlin Paintings: Total Abstraction,” Los Angeles County Museum of Art](#)

John McLaughlin (1898-1976), Southern California’s first momentous postwar artist, was among the most profound avant-garde painters to work in the United States in the aftermath of the cataclysm that was World War II. On view through April 16.

[“Renaissance and Reformation: German Art in the Age of Dürer and Cranach,” Los Angeles County Museum of Art](#)

German state museums in Berlin, Dresden and Munich lent more than 100 paintings, sculptures, drawings and decorative objects from their magnificent collections for this probing survey, a celebration of the imminent 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s Protestant Reformation. On view through March 26.

Worst trend: Running nonprofit art museums like for-profit businesses.

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