

THE BEST ART SHOWS OF 2018

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Tony DeLap's "Triple Trouble II." Photo courtesy of Tony DeLap and Rena Bransten Gallery

Despite being out of commission for two months while wrecking vengeance on a math class for a degree and a couple of weeks spent in Europe, I saw twice as many shows this past year than I did in 2017. There were new, surprisingly insightful ways of looking at paper, fish and secondhand-store refuse. There were moving retrospectives and exceptional work from painters, new and

established. An open studio from one of our best local sculptors. Work from a former Disney illustrator, and even an unnamed installation.

Having said that, I missed the opening of several shows at the new GWC Art Gallery during my hiatus, as well as exhibitions at some of the galleries listed below, including others I didn't visit at all because of my schedule or their lack of publicity. Consider this an incomplete list, but the best of the best that I saw are, in no particular order:

“TONY DELAP: A RETROSPECTIVE”

Jack of all artistic trades and magician, nonagenarian DeLap's retrospective honors his chameleon ability to disappear into his art, while critics are left to bicker over whether the work is minimalism, sculpture, finish fetish, painting, optical art, abstract, or an undefinable DeLapian hybrid of them all. Curated by Peter Frank at Laguna Art Museum.

“FISH OUT OF WATER”

I initially wouldn't have considered images of live sushi as anything that would be remotely interesting to look at, but curator David Michael Lee's devotion to the eccentric drew me in, so I threw out my line and pulled out several of LA and OC's finest artists in this neatly considered, creative and tongue-in-cheek exhibition for Coastline Art Gallery.

“ANDREA PATRIE: IN FRONT OF A DIRTY DOUBLE-MIRROR THEY FOUND ME”

Patrie's uneasy, provocative imagery is the kind of work that elicits discomfort. Tense, ugly, shocking, sexy, disturbing and unpleasant all at once, her large paintings and small sculptures succeed in sticking around long after you've walked away. Curator Laura Black's recognition of her skills, risk-taking and embrace of dark subject matter was a match made in heaven. At Fourth Element Gallery.

“LA ATTITUDE”

The trio of LA painters represented in this group show—William Wray, Scott Yeskel and Danny McCaw—at Sue Greenwood Fine Art

couldn't be more different in their style, but curator Greenwood made them work seamlessly together.

“JIM DEFRANCE: A RETROSPECTIVE”

Co-curators Tom Dowling and Trevor Norris' complex overview of the late artist's career—including the restoration of work damaged by the elements while in storage—created a poignant testament and context to DeFrance's unique talent. It revealed a sharp, unwavering look at death, as well as the tenderness resultant from keeping promises made to friends. At Frank M. Doyle Arts Pavilion at Orange Coast College.



From “Reclaimed Landscapes: The Art of Jarod Charzewski.” Photo courtesy of Cal State Fullerton

“RECLAIMED LANDSCAPES: THE ART OF JAROD CHARZEWSKI”

Used clothing, e-waste, old rubber and plastic layered and manipulated to re-create exquisite suggestions of flowing water, rock

and the foundations of earth, Charzewski's distressingly beautiful and imaginative environmental warning was unlike anything I'd seen before. Kudos to curators Danielle Clark and Jennifer Minasian for the exhilarating amount of volunteer help and thrift-store collection required to make this stellar exhibit at Cal State Fullerton's Nicholas and Lee Begovich Gallery happen.

ALISON PIRIE'S INSTALLATION

I have no idea how many people actually saw Pirie's powerful piece about school shootings set up briefly on the front lawn of Chapman University—I found out about it after the fact on artist Micol Hebron's Instagram account—but the chaotic pile of jumbled chairs and desks delivered a refreshing burst of moral pathos and political passion.

"THINKLAB LIVE .003: EXTINCT BIRD CAGES"

Elizabeth Turk let us into her process once more—having done it before in a different form at the Laguna Art Museum a few years ago—this time setting up live studio hours at Orange Coast College's Frank M. Doyle Arts Pavilion during which the curious could meet her, pick her brain and watch her work on developing an outdoor installation for the Catalina Island Museum. Her openness to revealing the minutiae of development, the complicated hours of research, and the expensive trial and error is an insightful and welcome demystification for the public.

"MAGICAL VISIONS: THE ENCHANTED WORLDS OF EYVIND EARLE"

The late Disney illustrator and concept artist for films as varied as Lady and the Tramp, Peter Pan and Sleeping Beauty was an accomplished painter, and this loan Szasz-curated exhibition of his fanciful, colorful landscape work took me to another place, somewhere between Never Never Land and Central California. At the Hilbert Museum of California Art.

"PAPERWORKS REFOLDED"

A case study in the art of thoughtful curation. Perfect in every way. Curated by Heather Bowling at Brea Gallery.

DAVE BARTON

Dave Barton has written for the OC Weekly for over twenty years, the last eight as their lead art critic. He has interviewed artists from punk rock photographer Edward Colver to monologist Mike Daisey,