

# Best of 2022: The biggest art stories mattered more than soup thrown on a Van Gogh



From left, artworks by Alexis Smith, Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun and Judith Leyster (Illustration by Mel Cerri / For The Times; photographs from Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; the Huntington Library, Art Museum and Botanical Gardens; Currier Museum of Art)

BY CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT | ART CRITIC  
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The COVID-19 pandemic isn't over, but museum and gallery exhibitions are getting back on track. Rather than write the usual list of 10 best shows, I'm sharing these 10 art stories that caught my eye this year.

## Gender spree



Reprinted from the article available at:

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2022-12-04/best-2022-art-women-artists-van-gogh-soup>

Alexis Smith, "Men Seldom Make Passes," 1985, mixed media mural (Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego)

The concentrated institutional effort toward gender equity in art museum exhibitions continues to bear fruit. In addition to group shows like those at Pomona's American Museum of Ceramic Art ("Breaking Ground: Women in California Clay") and the Orange County Museum of Art ("13 Women"), a flurry of solo retrospectives of important artists marks the year. Standouts include [Niki de Saint Phalle](#) and Alexis Smith at Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, [Christina Fernandez](#) at Riverside's California Museum of Photography, [Tala Madani](#) at L.A.'s Museum of Contemporary Art, [Ferne Jacobs](#) at Craft in America, [Linda Besemer](#) at Carolyn Campagna Kleefeld Contemporary Art Museum, [Rebecca Morris](#) at Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Lezley Saar at Craft Contemporary, [Barbara Kruger](#) at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, [Andrea Bowers](#) at the UCLA Hammer Museum and [Imogen Cunningham](#) and Uta Barth at the J. Paul Getty Museum. You go girl.

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### Gender bender



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Last year, the Getty Museum added a major [Artemisia Gentileschi](#) self-portrait (circa 1627) to its collection, while this year the Huntington Art Museum snagged a great [Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun](#) portrait of an aristocrat (circa 1784). Scrambling for gender equity in art museum Old Master [sic] collections also prompted New Hampshire's Currier Museum of Art to recently acquire a very lively, very rare picture on oak panel (circa 1629) by Dutch painter [Judith Leyster](#). The marvelously eccentric laughing boy hiding a bunch of grapes in his huge hat is one of fewer than 20 works firmly attributed to her. (Roughly the size of an 8- by 10-inch photograph, it recalls a [Rembrandt tronie](#) — an oil study of emotion and character.) The kicker: For 22 years, the Leyster painting was in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, a gift of popular TV comedian Red Skelton, but was sold off at a Sotheby's auction in 1977. (LACMA got \$5,750. What the Currier paid is undisclosed, but the little painting sold at a Belgian auction in April for nearly a quarter-million dollars.) Phooey.



Judith Leyster, "Boy Holding Grapes and a Hat," circa 1629, oil on panel (Currier Museum of Art)

## Museum blunder I



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The Carolyn Campagna Kleefeld Contemporary Art Museum is the former University Art Museum at Cal State Long Beach. (Tatiana Mata)

Pocketing a \$10-million gift, the venerable University Art Museum at Cal State Long Beach changed its name to recognize the artist-donor, [Carolyn Campagna Kleefeld](#), then set up a dedicated (and named) gallery inside the museum to show in perpetuity a group of rightly unheralded paintings by her, which she also donated. In effect, for a mess of pottage, a public school sold an inflated but permanent artistic legacy to a private citizen.

## Museum blunder II



Designed by Morphosis Architects, the 53,000-square-foot Orange County Museum of Art opened Oct. 8 (Mike Kelley)

The Orange County Museum of Art rushed its [opening](#), launching the debut before the building by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Thom Mayne's firm was finished. (It isn't expected to be completed until after the new year.) Apparently determined to open during its widely marketed 60th anniversary year, not after, the museum looked tacky. OCMA would have done better to wait until spring so that staff and art could settle in. That takes time, not least for important internal climate systems to stabilize.

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## Greater Hollywood



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The opening of “Crush” an exhibition of work by Adam Parker Smith, at the Hole in June. (From the Hole and Adam Parker Smith)

Gallery neighborhoods like downtown and West Adams have expanded and, following months of pandemic disruptions, gallery schedules began to come back to life over the summer. What we'll call Greater Hollywood, however, seems to be cementing its place as a power center of the L.A. gallery scene. Regen Projects essentially launched the district when it moved to an imposing new Michael Maltzan-designed building on Santa Monica Boulevard just west of Highland Avenue in 2012. The arriving influx now includes such heavy-hitter [New York galleries](#) as Sean Kelly, Marian Goodman, Lisson and David Zwirner.

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## Lesser Hollywood



Emile Reynaud's early "optical theater" to project animations is seen in a 1972 reconstruction (Christopher Knight / Los Angeles Times)

LACMA's "[City of Cinema: Paris 1850-1907](#)" was the year's most bizarre exhibition, built around an absurd claim that movies are "the twentieth century's greatest art form." Pandering to a powerful local industry hasn't been this crass since 2015, when Atlanta's High Museum of Art let the Coca-Cola Co. co-organize a centennial show celebrating the Coke bottle.

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## Book ban

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Vincent Van Gogh, "Tarascon Stagecoach," 1888, oil on canvas (Henry and Rose Pearlman Foundation)

Organizing a significant exhibition of Vincent Van Gogh paintings is impossible for a small museum, because loans won't materialize, insurance costs are crushing and what is left to know about one of the world's most beloved artists anyway? Impossible, that is, until it happens — which it did in February when the Santa Barbara Museum of Art opened the fascinating "[Through Vincent's Eyes: Van Gogh and His Sources](#)." Twenty of his paintings were joined by 75 examples by 62 other artists who had a revelatory impact on Van Gogh's singular achievement. Artists talking with artists through their art is riveting.

### Just Stop Oil paintings?



Protesters from Just Stop Oil sprayed orange paint on the facade of London's News Corp. (Just Stop Oil)

When fearless British climate activists from Just Stop Oil sprayed bright orange paint through fire extinguishers onto the London office facades of MI5, the Home Office, Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. and the Bank of England, the vivid color of danger was splashed all over institutions that protesters believe are aggressively contributing to the planet's collapse. The protesters' commitment was authentic, their targets apt, the mirroring of official climate vandalism pertinent and a willingness to deal with the consequences of potential arrest appropriate. Alas, other activists have been [throwing soup](#) and mashed potatoes at oil paintings by famous artists in European museums, all in a muddled bid for publicity that regrettably trivializes a grave issue affecting us all.

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