

The 79 Moments in Art That Helped Us Survive 2016

by [Jen Graves](#)



A piece by Senga Nengudi THE STRANGER

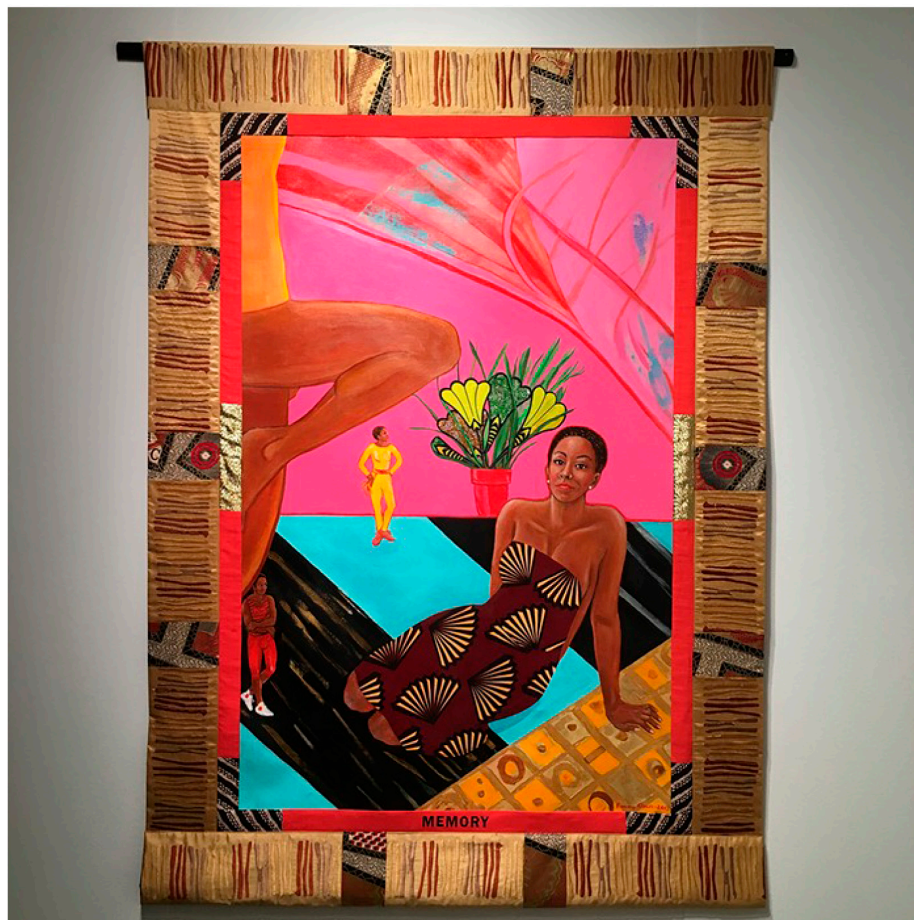
Read more of the **196 moments in music, art, books, theater, film, and TV that helped us survive 2016.**

- When my baby son learned to howl at the moon in order to accompany the howlingly gorgeous drawings of wolves made by living Native Salish artists in the (best ever) 2014 board book, *Goodnight World*.
- Marina Abramovic making all of Town Hall scream.
- Comics artist E.T. Russian sitting high up in the stands at KeyArena, sketching hundreds of dental patients laid out down on the stadium floor receiving free, no-questions-asked treatment during the Seattle/King County Free Health Clinic.
- The loving audience-within-an-audience that Romson Bustillo preselected to encircle and inspire dancer David Rue while Rue performed at King Street Station during the art-and-tech festival 9e2.
- Artist Maggie Carson Romano's beautiful torn face photographed plainly, and all that displaying it meant about seen and unseen pain.
- Weston Jandacka's Glass Box Gallery. Every month. But especially walking through No Touching Ground's exhibition with Dorli Rainey, the small woman who's a giant of Seattle activism. (And, always, No Touching Ground himself.)
- Curtis Steiner's ecstatic coat rack with drinking straws at studio e gallery.
- The way that abstraction held space for Black artists Steffani Jemison and Brenna Youngblood in Seattle in 2016.
- Storme Webber's butch timeless Seattle, enacted on video in *Trans Hirstory in 99 Objects* by Chris E. Vargas. Also in Vargas's exhibition, looking across time and locking eyes with Harry, the trans man defining his own freedom despite being hounded by police and displayed by newspapers in early 20th-century Seattle.
- The private conversation in which art dealer James Harris described artist Akio Takamori's new, still-unseen series portraying men struggling to make their apologies while they still have time.
- All the unglamorous, archival work Martha Rosler did to update for Seattle her 1980s exhibition on the New York housing crisis, at the New Foundation gallery.

- The feeling of turning a corner and seeing Seattle artist Cris Bruch's transubstantiation of a thin slab of material and some light on a wall into a distant horizon pregnant with sunrise.
- The following Claudia Rankine lines, from her book *Citizen*: "White people wanted to be white just as much as we did. They worked just as hard at it. They failed just as often. They failed more often. But they could pass, so no one objected."
- The moment when the light of the imaginary train appeared in Seattle sculptor Rick Araluce's reincarnation of the Great Northern Tunnel. A new train would come, always a new beginning from out of the dark, because you imagined it.
- The mandatory smiles of Black men, lasting an hour and a half, in Kehinde Wiley's 2001 video *Smile*.
- At Seattle Art Museum there was a small, out-of-the-way show featuring, among many other things, a tiny man carved in low relief atop an ivory tusk made on the Loango Coast of Kongo during the height of the slave trade there. His body is bent in half, his head in his hands. There, here, he is.
- The deeply private expressions on the faces of the male prisoners posing in front of cheery murals for the only photographs allowed inside American prisons, collected and commissioned by Alyse Emdur and included in Pete Brook's show *Prison Obscura* at Evergreen State College.
- Those two pink peonies hovering above their vase without stems, plump as blimps yet afloat and fragile, in Jeffrey Mitchell's drawing at Joe Bar.
- Keller Easterling's tragi-sarcastic giant stack of gift boxes wrapped in coded paper representing the different aspects of all those things a city offers to the corporate campuses moving in, at the Henry Art Gallery. From the legend to *Gift City's* wrapping paper: "Of all the incalculable gifts a city has been saving up for its investors, maybe the most priceless one is diversity and complexity."
- After-hours at Seattle painter Norman Lundin's studio, caught in it's-so-late-but-the-light-isn't-gone still-lives displayed at Greg Kucera Gallery.
- That first ride up the escalators from underground at the University of Washington Light Rail Station, Seattle artist Leo Saul Berk's homage to sedimentary earth made of silver-and-blue light twinkling all around.
- Unplaceable scents in tiny bottles of liquid, set out on a low, inviting little shelf at Interstitial gallery by Seattle artist Mario Lemafa.
- The quiet, long-haul irrepressibility of Seattle artist Jed Dunkerley.
- The Henry Art Gallery's neglected, skylit real ceiling, usually obscured by a layer of solid white panels, temporarily torn open and exposed by Seattle artist Jason Hirata for his Goya-inspired installation *Fodder*.
- The small, square Noah Davis canvas—unframed, made recently, not long before the remarkable young artist, and Seattle native, died of cancer—tucked in between all the Frye Art Museum's big, gilt-framed paintings from a century ago. Those big paintings are supposed to be the most important things at the Frye, and nothing is supposed to join them in this room, according to Charles Frye's will. But this Davis was hiding out in there, a little subversive act of inclusion, a painting showing an endearing, brown-skinned man, the face bespectacled and open, curious, ready.
- Noah Davis's last collages, made when he was so sick that he could barely sit up. They are raw yet indirect, giving plenty but also holding on to their own secrets, mixing recognizable and abstract imagery, news clippings, and every kind of brush stroke and color wash. Each one is no larger than a page in a diary. They deserve their own church. They lined the hallway leading down the length of the Frye Art Museum during the unforgettable exhibition *Young Blood: Noah Davis, Kahlil Joseph, The Underground Museum*, curated by the artists' friend, another Seattle artist, Maikoiyo Alley-Barnes.
- The drips and sheer sunspots in Noah Davis's 2015 untitled painting of a man lying alone in a boat. The awkward woman on the right in Davis's 2008 *Casting Call*. The mountains and that pink shirt in *The Internal Contract*, 2009.
- Noticing that mega-developer Martin Selig placed a huge naked-man bronze sculpture by Colombian artist Fernando Botero in front of one of his buildings in the middle of downtown. Calling Selig and asking him why he didn't place the penis at polishable level, the way they did when that same sculpture was displayed in New York. Being met with an absolute refusal to discuss the potential fun of penises.
- The washed-out purplish fabric of the greatest Korean wrapping cloth, or *bojagi*, that Seattle Art Museum owns, made sometime in the 20th century from leftover scraps by an unnamed woman. It looks on the verge of dust, but there it always stands, still ready to embrace a gift.

- The flaming macaw feathers that were buried for centuries under the extremely dry high mountains of Peru, now emblazoning a miniature children's tunic at the Asian Art Museum.
- Visiting the woman who spent untold hours alone in the Seattle Art Museum basement with Goya's *Caprichos*, reframing each of the printed horrors that have been too beautiful to look away from since they were made in brutal 18th-century Spain—and that shouldn't be so relevant.
- The brilliant, relevant shows at the Alice Gallery in Georgetown every month, accompanied by press releases that are pieces of poetry inspired by love, not publicity.
- Learning about the great Seattle artist/musician Milt Simons (1923–1973) by coming face-to-face with his swirling, surreal, monumental Seattle cityscape *Introspection* at Tacoma Art Museum. Simons suffered a life of brutal racism, but his work still sings.
- That proud, angelic, wispy-eared black terrier Sherry Markovitz made out of paint on fabric.
- The face-switching feature on Snapchat.
- Watching master Seattle ceramicist Patti Warashina use glass.
- The throbbing red butterflies Tracy Rector stenciled across Capitol Hill, each marking a spot where a woman was raped or murdered.
- The subterranean world of Push/Pull collective in Ballard.
- The way that Patte Loper's maze of sculpted, drawn, painted, and digitally rendered models of Seattle's pasts and futures suspended time itself inside Suyama Space, and the fact that my teenage son was the first one to notice and diagnose what we were experiencing.
- The emergence of Satpreet Kahlon.
- Pat DeCaro's girl roaming completely free in a big, dark night made up of several midnight landscapes all tied together in a huge grid that spanned the walls at 4Culture Gallery.
- Coming upon an installation of pretty gray soaps set on a shelf by the Seattle artist Julia Freeman, who is white. Then the label: "soap made from wood ash from family farm in southern Missouri owned pre-Civil War." Then the chilling, mournful title, *Lady Macbeth*.
- The recorded voices of Tariqa Waters's boisterous Southern family overhead in the gallery of her vibrant photographs and her grandmother's church hats (themselves sculptures) at the Northwest African American Museum.
- The righteous label the Northwest African American Museum put on Edward Curtis's 1898 photograph *A Desert Queen*, of a busty, unnamed Black woman who directs her expression of mild disgust right at the camera: "Curtis displays his subject as royalty. Does he honor her by this designation or demean her by creating a sexualized fantasy? Virginia writer Ana Edwards finds 'peek-a-boo, Victorian pornographic fashion' in the image. 'I hate this picture,' she concludes."
- The poetry of Tivon Rice's algorithm that took a city planning database and turned it into an absurdist script about Seattle, with only two characters: planner and public. It ought to be performed.
- Seeing Donnie Chin and Chinatown, USA, through the eyes (and words and lens) of Dean Wong.
- Knowing that Paul Rucker and his family sewed those Klan robes themselves, and reading Kate Boyd's writing on that process in artist Matthew Offenbacher's zine, *La Norda Speciale*.
- That painting at the Ballard Farmers Market of a dolphin rising from a painter's palette and examining itself in another painting. Oh, yes.
- Talking art and the status of unmarried ladies with collector Kim Richter.
- Discovering that the fever and music of Senga Nengudi is not limited to her (admittedly tremendous) pantyhose sculptures—not at all.
- That one place in the Barbara Earl Thomas paper cut where the blood turns to bowl.
- The old Yesler Terrace featured in the truly great film *Hagereseb* by Zia Mohajerjasbi, which came out in 2015 but I only saw this year.
- The warm air coming off C. Davida Ingram's photographs printed on sheer fabric at Bridge Productions.

- Not feeling the need to genuflect, so not feeling the need to dis.
- A new generation of civil rights photography and strategy.
- The continued inhabitation of King Street Station by Seattle artists during Seattle Art Fair.
- *What You See Is What You Sweat* during Seattle Art Fair at the Center on Contemporary Art in Pioneer Square, curated and with art by—take all their names for history's sake—C. Davida Ingram, Chieko Philips, Christopher Shaw, Leilani Lewis, Zorn B. Taylor, Alex Anderson, Juventino Aranda, Romson Bustillo, micha cárdenas, Nicholas Galanin, Satpreet Kahlon, Mark Mitchell, Darius Morrison, Jeffrey Veregge, and Viradeth Xay-Ananh.
- That time when Takashi Murakami got on Facebook Live with me spontaneously at Pivot Art + Culture, where *Juxtapoz x Superflat* was showing, and where across the street in a parking lot, for the same show, a Japanese avant-garde floral arranger did a performance in the middle of the day involving an "arrangement" of shopping carts and a couch piled on top of a car he lurched around and climbed on dangerously, which involved him adding actual blood to the sunny, art-fair-y day.
- Britta Johnson in her nonthreatening elementary-school-teacher outfit, passing out fictional bake-sale flyers outside Paul Allen's Seattle Art Fair to protest Allen's defunding of Seattle arts nonprofits.
- The happiness of those who deserved to make sales, and did, at Seattle Art Fair.
- That one guy at Seattle Art Fair who met the glitz and glamour with just the most major butt crack.
- The fact that on the day that Stephen Lyons graciously closed the physical Platform Gallery (it exists online and in pop-up form), vestiges of the nearly decade-old Brad Biancardi painting still remained on the concrete floor.
- The fact that Seattle Art Fair included dance. In other words: Tonya Lockyer. (Always Tonya Lockyer.)



Emma Amos *Memory* JEN GRAVES

- Emma Amos at Ryan Lee Gallery at Seattle Art Fair. (Look her up.)
- When artist Christopher Paul Jordan took a chance and told me the way he really felt about something I had written.
- The self-challenging, forward-charging excellence of pretty much every single person at Seattle's Office of Arts & Culture. These are the opposite of bureaucrats.
- The places where black-and-white plastic films pull on each other in Clay Apenouvon's tapestries at Mariane Ibrahim Gallery.
- When the clothing Fay Jones paints is see-through.
- A few hours with Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, wind in her hair, at NOAA.
- Every time Akio Takamori has opened his studio to me.
- The way that the collaboration between Mary Ellen Mark, Martin Bell, and Erin "Tiny" Blackwell—which began on Pike Street in the 1980s—ended up with photographs of the unjudgeable complexities of Tiny's proud motherhood, seen at Seattle Public Library.
- What Carlos Ruiz and Ty Ziskis can do with a former peep show.
- The swimming pool that turns into a tunnel with a light at the end of it (okay, it's the sun, but it won't hit you that way, and also, isn't it right to think of the sun as a tunnel with a light at the end of it, anyway?) in a mural made by John Osgood, Zachary Bohnenkamp, and Sensei 23 in 2010. The mural travels around empty storefronts up north. I saw it at 105th and Aurora.
- Seeing late Seattle artist Alden Mason's 1960s painting of a deconstructed clown (it's smart and hilarious) in a hallway at the main campus of Swedish Hospital, on my way to meet a newborn, giving me another reason to reassure the newborn this was an okay world.
- When Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's facial-recognition installation tried to find one of the 43 missing Mexican students while only being able to look at me instead, in Amanda Donnan's smart show *Robots Building Robots* at the Hedreen Gallery.
- The way Dakota Gearhart reveals strangeness we try to cover.
- Justen Waterhouse's text panel at INCA, made in ink that turns black over the course of many years. Actually, that whole group show (which she organized), *The Crossing Over Place*.
- Happening to visit the warehouse-fulls of installations by the Japanese collective teamLab—at the most elaborate pop-up in world history in Silicon Valley—with my teenage daughter, because nobody else seemed to grasp the unlimited hilarity of the music in the bird room.
- The just barely visible message held aloft by the cheerleader in Franc Guerrero's terrific painting at V2 at the tail end of November. It murmured, "ILL," and there were so many ways to relate.★