

GAGOSIAN

ARTnews

Defending Works Left on the Cutting Room Floor of Our 'Best Artworks of the 21st Century' List



Our [list of the best artworks of the 21st century](#) features 100 pieces and 15,000 words of copy, but for the editors of *ARTnews* and *Art in America*, it was still not enough.

Left on the cutting room floor were many, many pieces we still cared a lot about. Some didn't end up making the final list because the editors couldn't agree on their merits. Some didn't make it because they occurred to us only late in the process, once the list had been settled upon. And some didn't make it because there simply wasn't enough room.

But, in an effort to take stock of just a few more works, each editor who helped in the making of the list decided to stick up for one more work that didn't make it in the end. This is not an article devoted to talked-about and widely loved artworks that were omitted from our list—[we know](#)

there are quite a few. Instead, it's a grouping of pieces that are being defended here, both personally and passionately, by editors who participated.

Here are defenses on the behalf of a few more great artworks.

Michael Heizer, *Levitated Mass*, 2012



Michael Heizer, Levitated Mass, 2012.
Photo : Getty Images

Standing beneath a 340-ton granite megalith that rests on the edges of concrete walls but appears to float against the clear California sky makes for a sublime kind of experience. So too does taking a moment to try to apprehend all that went into the seemingly Sisyphean task of setting such a rock in its current resting place. The latter is the subject of *Levitated Mass: The Story of Michael Heizer's Monolithic Sculpture*, a 2013 documentary that follows, in granular detail, the narrative attached to Land art maestro Michael Heizer's contribution to the grounds of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The work involved was formidable, from the artist identifying the choice rock in a quarry in Riverside County to the countless bureaucratic roadblocks that had to be negotiated to transport it on a specially constructed 206-wheeled trucking apparatus around highways, bridges, and overpasses that were barely up to the task. What I like most about *Levitated Mass* is how it both touts its own story and laughs away the spectacle, with a stone face that can be hard to read and rewarding to ponder. —*Andy Battaglia*

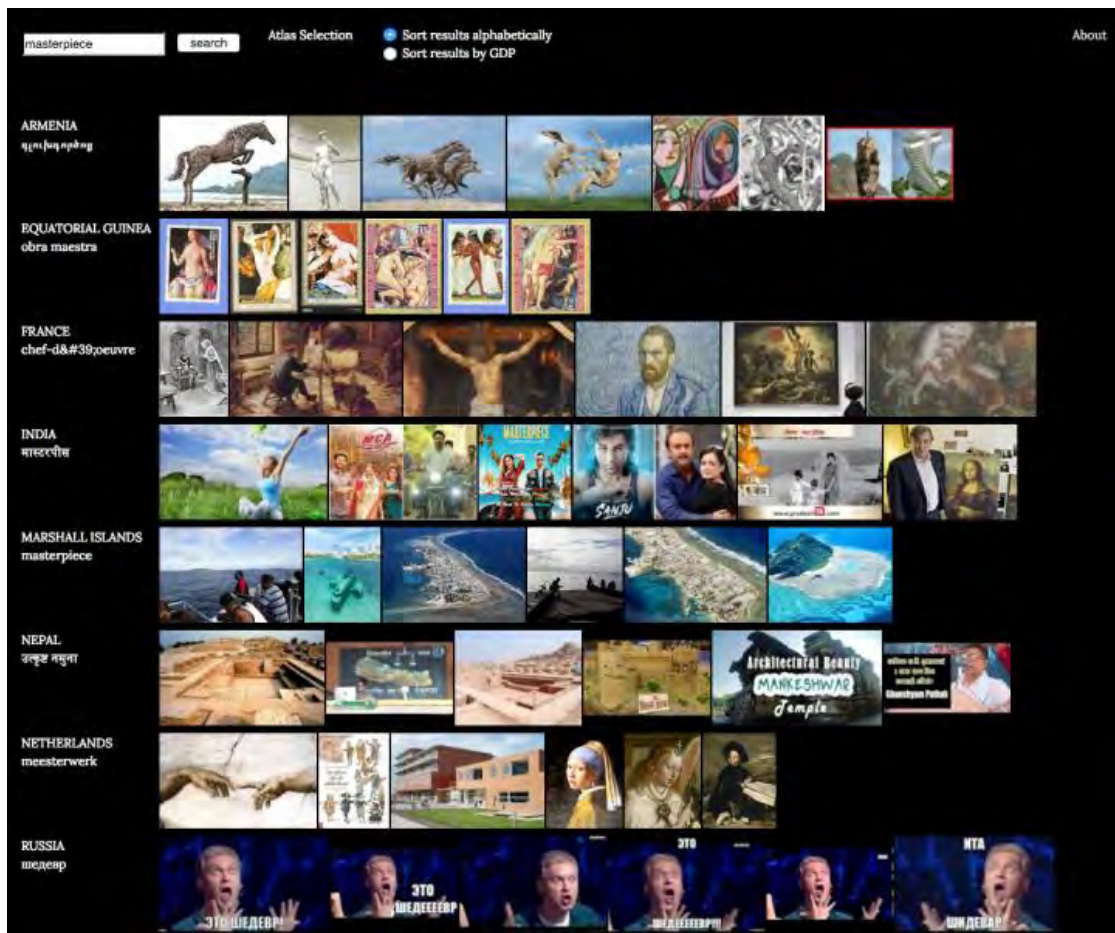
Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates*, 1979–2005



Christo and Jeanne-Claude, The Gates, 1979–2005.
Photo : Photo David Handschuh/NY Daily News via Getty Images

It was only when I put up my hand to write this that I realized I'd become open to revising my former opinion about *The Gates*. When the piece went up 20 years ago in Central Park, where 7,500 gate-like structures draped in billowing fabric traced a 23 mile-long trail, I felt aligned with the observations of critics like *New York Magazine's* Mark Stevens, who called the piece a "visual one-liner" and observed that "the artists and their fans call the color 'saffron,' ...but it looks more like a Wal-Mart orange." In retrospect, however, *The Gates* has grown on me. I've come to see the merits that a close acquaintance of mine has been trying to convince me of for two decades: that it was such a New York thing, such an urban thing; that it went up in a cold period (February) when winter is still there but ending, a hopeful moment; that it brought together an aesthetic experience of art with an aesthetic experience of nature, approaching the sublime; that it created an occasion for both reflection and perception; that it brought people together. —*Sarah Douglas*

Taryn Simon and Aaron Swartz, *Image Atlas*, 2012



*A search for the word "masterpiece" on Image Atlas in 2018.
Photo : Via Rhizome*

I still vividly recall when my editor showed me *Image Atlas* in 2012. At the time, I had a limited understanding of net.art and digital art, and didn't totally realize this collaborative project by artist Taryn Simon and computer programmer Aaron Swartz, commissioned by Rhizome, was an actual artwork, but I was enthralled by its provocative underpinning. On a simple website, visitors would type in a key word—"freedom fighter" or "masterpiece," for example—into its search bar and receive the top five images from a given country's most popular search engine (now 195, originally 17) based on real-time queries, which can then be sorted alphabetically or by GDP. The resulting set of images can be vastly different based on each country's own specific culture. It's easy to think that we are all accessing the same internet and receiving the same results, and it was especially easy to think that back in 2012. *Image Atlas* implodes that theory, showing that the internet is not—and never has been—the objective and neutral digital superhighway it has long been considered. With the transformations in the internet, search engines, and social media over the last decade the work seems even more essential to understanding our current visual culture than before.

—Maximiliano Durón