



30 DEC 2016

# 2016 Highlights: Sean O'Toole

A remarkable Beauford Delaney show to black women artists collective iQhiya: a few small reasons to whisper hallelujah

BY SEAN O'TOOLE

Papa Wemba, Pauline Oliveros, Mandoza, Tony Conrad, Alan 'Frankie Teardrop' Vega, the artists formerly known as Prince Rogers Nelson and Malik Izaak Taylor – all points on a musical compass suggesting different destinations, all gone now. Before anything, a word of thanks, borrowed from Leonard Cohen, another traveller whose final destination was 2016: 'I'll stand before the lord of

song/ with nothing on my tongue but hallelujah.’ Hallelujah. Despite the temper and tone of this dismal year – marked by serial outrages, populist triumphs and bombs dropped like confetti by imperial powers – there were small reasons to rejoice, to quietly whisper hallelujah.



Beauford Delaney, *The Time of Your Life*, 1945, oil on board, 86 x 136 cm. Courtesy: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York © Estate of Beauford Delaney

The supposed orthodoxy in some quarters is that art fairs are not places to rejoice. But in March, on the same weekend that Berliners Julia Grosse and Yvette Mutumba of Contemporary And (C&) confidently organized a showcase of new art from Africa at New York’s The Armory Show, dealer Michael Rosenfeld presented a remarkable solo exhibition of work by painter Beauford Delaney at the Art Dealers Association of America’s fair in the Park Avenue Armory. The show succinctly answered why Delaney, an outstanding colourist and in later years wholly abstract painter, has been a lodestar to successive generations, including James Baldwin and Glenn Ligon.







Glenn Ligon, *Untitled (Bruise/Blues)*, 2014, neon and paint, 310 x 87 cm, installation view, blank projects, Cape Town, 2016. © Glenn Ligon

Delaney's influence is pronounced on Ligon, whose neon work *Untitled (Bruise/Blues)* (2014) was included in Stevenson's ambitious (yet somehow also curtailed) visual engagement with K. Sello Duiker's 2001 novel *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* at its Johannesburg and Cape Town outlets this past summer. 'Delaney is a touchstone for me in that he was a queer man, as Baldwin was, negotiating his relationship to the society that he was born in and ultimately choosing exile in Paris in order to ease the bite of American racism,' Ligon told me a few months before American voters made a fateful decision. 'As he said, you can't be an expatriate if you are not considered a citizen. I identify with that search for oneself in the world, and I identify with the sense of not being a full-fledged citizen of one's country, a country which seems to value black lives as lesser than others.'



iQhiya, *The Portrait. The Old Pass Office Museum*, Langa, Cape Town, 2016, performance documentation. Courtesy: the artists; photograph: Gerald Machona

South Africans too are dealing with populist demagogues and historical legacies. In Cape Town, a collective of black women artists known as iQhiya self-assuredly asserted their right to be in a series of public performances. Their rapid assimilation into the schedule of fairs and festivals, after a synoptic

exhibition showcasing their individual practices at the Association for Visual Arts, did somewhat cool my optimistic belief in the group's incursive potential. The liberal art world is also a space where ideas are domesticated. But, on balance, iQhiya, whose members were involved in the occupation of Cape Town's Michaelis School of Fine Art, owned 2016.



<<https://www.ruinart.com/en-uk/erwinolaf>>



Banele Khoza, *The Fifth Wheel*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 90 x 120 cm. Courtesy: the artist

Three solo exhibitions in the spring and summer months, each by established figures, were reasons to rejoice. In Cape Town, Moshekwa Langa's 'Ellipses', his first show with Stevenson, was a decisive recapitulation of his intuitive method. In Berlin, Edmund de Waal's two-venue takeover of Galerie Max Hetzler, 'Irrkunst', reminded me that some colours, some experiences, some physical art works refuse the capture of the photograph, and indeed the bland parsing of words. Michael MacGarry's 'Between Rot and Genesis', at Everard Read in Johannesburg, explored ideas of resource extraction and neo-colonialism with subtlety, humour, rigour and a material generosity. Banele Khoza's mid-year

solo exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum, 'Temporary Feelings', introduced a larger public to this Swaziland-born painter's loose figuration and emotional register; he is one to watch in 2017.

Rigour, ritual and rigor mortis: I'm thinking about the dreaded art symposium. In Bern, at the Paul Klee Centre's final *Sommerakademie*, guest curator Thomas Hirschhorn invited German philosopher Marcus Steinweg to speak. 'We need better journalists than artists who try to be better journalists,' Steinweg offered. A month later, at Norway's Bergen Assembly, a group of mostly London-based scholars invited to organize the third iteration of this research triennial attempted to be better at many things – journalism, curation, deejaying, critical practice. Historian Mike Berlin's convivial presentation on the Partisan Café, a short-lived leftist redoubt in late 1950s Soho, London, far exceeded the ritual hermeneutics of the Assembly's core clan of thinkers.



Neo Muyanga performing *Revolting Music* at ICA's 'Third Space Symposium – Decolonisation and the Creative Arts', 14 May 2016. Courtesy: Institute for Creative Arts, Cape Town; photograph: Malik Ntone

Pleasure and ideology can co-exist, as musician Neo Muyanga's work-in-progress libretto *Revolting Music*, a selection of 'slightly deconstructed' songs by labourers, revolutionaries and the faithful, demonstrated when he sang at the Third Space Symposium, the launch event for the rebranded Institute for Creative Arts in Cape Town. Hallelujah.

Main image: *iQhiya, The Portrait*. The Old Pass Office Museum, Langa, Cape Town, 2016, performance documentation. Courtesy: the artists; photograph: Gerald Machona

---

## SEAN O'TOOLE

Sean O'Toole is a regular *frieze* columnist and co-editor of *CityScapes*, a critical journal for urban enquiry. He lives in Cape Town, South Africa.

---



---

2016 HIGHLIGHTS

BEAUFORD DELANEY

IQHIYA

BANELE KHOZA

NEO MUYANGA

SEAN O'TOOLE

---

### London

1 Montclare Street  
London  
E2 7EU, UK  
+44 (0)203 372  
6111

### New York

247 Centre St  
5th Floor  
New York, NY  
10013  
+1 212 463 7488

### Berlin

Zehdenicker Str.  
28  
D-10119 Berlin  
Germany  
+49 30 2362 6506