

HYPERALLERGIC

Art

Best of 2019: Our Top 15 Exhibitions Around the World

Our picks for the best exhibitions of 2019 outside the United States, and brought to you by the writers and editors of Hyperallergic.



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This year's crop of art exhibitions were more diverse than ever, which made picking our top 15 favorites difficult (we added three honorable mentions), but we asked some staff members and contributors to offer their takes on what stood out this year.

From unique historical explorations of off-the-beaten-path modernism to comprehensive surveys of whole art scenes, the selections reflect the wide range that continues to be part of art today.

[...]

11. Magda Campos Pons's *Rios Intermitentes* in Matanzas during the Havana Biennial, Matanzas, Cuba

April 12–May 12

Curated by Magda Campos Pons

Located between the major tourist destinations of Havana and Varadero, the port city of Matanzas, Cuba, has a rich and complex cultural history, spanning a 19th-century sugar economy based on enslaved labor to a present-day contemporary art boom. On the occasion of the *VIII Havana Biennial*, Matanzas-born artist María Magdalena Campos Pons produced a wildly ambitious exhibition celebrating the cultural richness of her hometown. Noting that Matanzas, known as the “Athens of Cuba,” is Cuba’s “center of black culture,” Campos Pons included 30 artists of the African diaspora (of 64 artists total). The exhibition occupied the former Palacio de Justicia and other venues around the city, including riverbanks and the town square.

The *2019 Havana Biennale* was prominently boycotted and protested by artists objecting to Decree 349, a restrictive national law strictly legislating cultural activities. Away from the focal point of this affair in the capital city, Campos Pons forged an exhibition concerned with intersections and connections, titling her exhibition after the unique landscape of Matanzas, with its convergence of three rivers. She looked at the biennial as an opportunity to bring the work of over 20 artists and collectives who live and work in Matanzas into dialogue with dozens of artists invited from international locations, from the US to Pakistan.

Matanzas artist Ernesto Millán’s “Sábanas blancas: Transparencia, 2018–2019” filled the central courtyard of the main venue with screenprinted sheets, which he previously placed throughout Matanzas streets, homes, and businesses and documented in a video that screened during the exhibition. These colorful sheets were suspended overhead, perpetually surrounded by onlookers from the always lively Bar Matanzas, created for the exhibition by Campos Pons and used as a local meeting point and hang out spot. Nearby, Olu Oguibe undertook a short residency at a steel factory, creating a new installation using industrial refuse. An active event roster included talks, performances, processions, and ecological conservation activities (e.g. a reforestation tree-planting effort), organized by Campos Pons with family members assisting. *Ríos Intermitentes* was a true feat, all-hands-on-deck barn raising affair in which the designations of participants, staff, artists, and audiences seemed to blend. Reflecting on this project, Campos Pons referred to herself as a “curandera not a curadora” – a healer, not a curator.

—*Rebecca Uchill*