

Artists of the Year: The Best Visual Artists, Performers, and More from 2014


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It's not just about having a great year, but where we're going, and what part 2014 plays in the big picture of things. We kept this in mind when selecting candidates for this edition of Artists of the Year, which includes notable actors both up-and-coming and established, architecture firms that have brought new life to old buildings, and a yarn bomber who manages to work both commercially and underground.

Let's revisit some of the people, projects, and moments of 2014 that make us excited to see what 2015 will bring.



Sculpture by Sonja Peterson

Sonja Peterson

Visual Arts

The most famous Scandinavian practitioner of psaligraphy (fine paper cutting) may be fairy-tale author Hans Christian Andersen, who snipped while storytelling in order to unfold his remarkable cuttings as a visual finale to his tales. But Minneapolis artist Sonja Peterson needs little verbal narrative to explicate her large-scale paper works. Whole worlds exist within the intricate details of her complex cuttings. Native plants and cultures clash with invaders. Historical events merge with present-day environmental dilemmas. The effects of globalization are intertwined with commerce and consciousness.

The imposing scale, not to mention the sheer beauty, of Peterson's work seemingly defines its delicate, lace-like construction. The shadows she creates through deft attention to the power of negative and positive space give Peterson's work substance that defies its first-glance whimsy. The Burnet Gallery at Le Méridien Chambers often shows her work, with "Becoming Animal Becoming Intense" a permanent installation. She's also had a solo show at the Bell Museum of Natural History, and exhibited in galleries through the Twin Cities and Midwest.

An artist residency at the American Swedish Institute in 2014, during which Peterson's exhibition "Entangled Introductions" was on display, further enhanced her reputation — and expanded its reach. Incorporating floral and animal imagery, the work delved into the origins of Swedish Dala painting: the story of Jonah, and the kurbits (a plant) he survived on while living in the desert. By embedding yet another layer of narrative within an already daedal design, she achieved psaligraphic alchemy.

While her pieces often depict humanity's desire and ongoing attempts to control nature, there's no questioning Peterson's supreme control of her material and the tool with which she renders her work, revelatory and complete. —**Camille LeFevre**