

Highlights 2015 – Timotheus Vermeulen

DECEMBER 11, 2015 *by Timotheus Vermeulen*



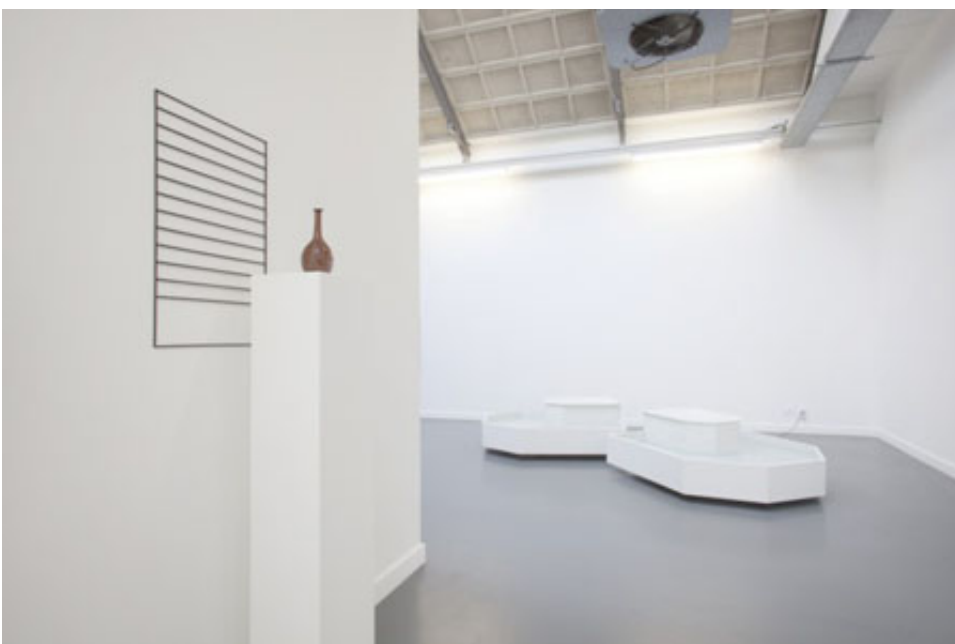
Mario Merz, *Untitled (Igloo)*, 1989. 'Elements', 2015, Kiasma Museum, Helsinki, Finland; photograph: Finnish National Gallery / Pirje Mykkänen

I've not managed to see and read and listen as much this year as I would have hoped to (does one ever?). But among the books, exhibitions, television series, films and records that I did find the time for, there were some that were just magical, that blew me away – or alternately, but no less marvellous, that drew me into their worlds entirely. Reviewing these experiences, I found there to be no real rhyme or reason relating them, so I have jotted them down more or less as they came to mind. This is not to say that the order is random though, as memory is certainly an affective ordering system.



Mariele Neudecker, *Think of One Thing*, 2002, in 'Elements', 2015, Kiasma Museum, Helsinki, Finland; photograph Finnish National Gallery / Pirje Mykkänen | Sanna Ikäläinen

One of my most memorable experiences of art took place early this year at Helsinki's Kiasma Museum. I don't know what it was exactly that made me care so much for the exhibition ['Elements'](#) drawn from the museum's collection including pieces by Mario Merz, Jannis Kounellis, Janna Laine, Maria Wirkkala, and Marielle Neudecker. Though I loved – and I mean loved – some of these works, I certainly did not feel a connection with all of the photographs, installations and sculptures included. I've thought about it quite a bit since, but I haven't figured it out. Perhaps I should thank the curators for creating a rhythm that resonated with my own; maybe my experience was influenced by a gallery show about the Anthropocene I had seen a few hours earlier; it might have been something else altogether, like the fact that I explored it together with my partner, or the food I had, or... as it sometimes happens with exhibitions or works that resonate, I do not really know. In any case, I was much taken by this exhibition. Speaking of the Kiasma, there was also a contemporary portraiture exhibition on at the same time of my visit, entitled ['Face to Face'](#), which featured some very impressive works, including the video *Michael* by Abel Abidin.



'The Museum of Unconditional Surrender', a temporary fictional museum at TENT, Rotterdam, the Netherlands,

curated by Niekolaas Johannes Lekkerkerk

Other exhibitions I want to mention are the thought-provoking, and often funny ‘Museum of Unconditional Surrender’ in [‘TENT Rotterdam’](#) Witte de With’s [‘Art in the age of...’](#) series; Anne Pöhlmann’s [solo exhibition](#) at Kunstverein Krefeld; Andrea Büttner at [Museum Ludwig, Cologne](#) Jan Albers’s retrospective at [Kunsthalle Wuppertal](#) Marlene Dumas at [Tate Modern](#) Ed Atkins’ solo at the [Stedelijk](#) in Amsterdam and Jonas Staal’s latest project in Rojava.



[New World Summit–Rojava, Part I](#) from [New World Summit](#) on [Vimeo](#).

I can’t wait, by the way, to see what Nástio Mosquito has put together for the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, as part of the four-person show curated by Annie Fletcher, [‘Positions #2’](#), on now and running till April next year.



I agree with those who say that the golden age of television is over. What was original in *The Wire* and *Mad Men* has become cliché in shows like *True Detectives* and *House of Cards*. Exceptions to this decline

of television are *Broad City*, whose second season was as innovative formally as it was hilarious experientially; and the new *Master of None* starring Aziz Ansari, which manages to intelligently and earnestly discuss more socio-political issues than *Newsnight*, ranging from the representation of ‘Indians on television’, to sexism, to inter-generational conflict. It has thus far not problematized class, with each and everyone of its characters comfortably middle-class, but this might be addressed in a subsequent season. I still have to watch the final episode, but based on the first four, *London Spy* gets top marks as well.

2015 seems to have been a very busy year for films, but I am embarrassed to say I haven’t really engaged much so far. I mostly found myself eager to rewatch *Children of Men* (2006), a film that appears more prophetic by the day.



I thought Denis Villeneuve’s [Sicario](#), though not without its problems, was stellar, with some excellent acting performances by Emily Blunt, Josh Brolin and Benicio del Toro. Céline Sciamma’s [Girlhood](#) really gripped me, as did [The Clouds of Sils Maria](#) directed by Olivier Assayas. Christian Petzold’s [Phoenix](#) was inconsistent but had its moments, as did the Pixar animation [Inside Out](#). On the watch list for Christmas: [Carol](#), by my favourite director Todd Haynes; Sean Baker’s [Tangerine](#) Hsiao-Hsien Hou’s much lauded [The Assassin](#) and Chantal Akerman’s [No Home Movie](#).



Andrea Büttner, images in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, 2014, offset-print in a series of 11 prints, Courtesy Hollybush Gardens, London and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, © Andrea Büttner / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2014

Finally, I read Ben Lerner's novel *10:04* about five times, each time cherishing different paragraphs and sentences, thoughts and observations; MacKenzie Wark's brilliantly original *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene*; Joris Luyendijk's anthropological account of the banking system *Dit kan niet waar zijn* ('This cannot be true'), which has thus far been published only in Dutch, but is a must-read if, and when, it comes out in the UK; the Zlatan Ibrahimovic biography; Eimar McBride's novel *A girl is a half-formed thing*; Andrea Büttner's beautiful reprint of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*; and also, definitely, the new Robert Galbraith/J.K. Rowling mystery [Career of Evil](#), which scared the hell out of me.

About the author



Timotheus Vermeulen is Assistant Professor in Cultural Theory at Radboud University Nijmegen, where he also heads the Centre for New Aesthetics. He is co-founding editor of the academic arts and culture webzine Notes on Metamodernism. He is currently completing two books on metamodernism.

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