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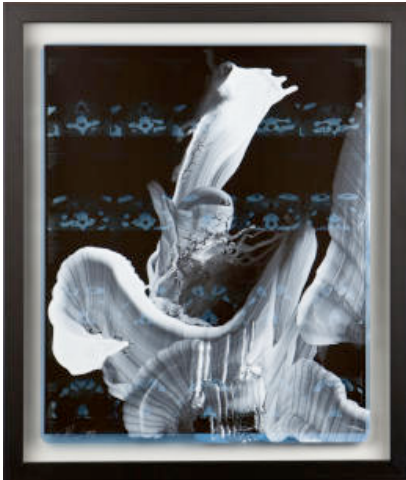


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Art highlights in 2009

By DOUGLAS BRITT Copyright 2009 Houston Chronicle
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Michael Tims, Houston Baptist University Artist Virgil Grotfeldt created his final body of work by painting in oil on X-ray scans of his own brain, a record of his long battle with lymphatic illness.

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to survey the obscure career of one of his top students, Francisco Matto, was just a road trip away at Austin's Blanton Museum of Art. The Station Museum of Contemporary Art's *Carlos Runcie-Tanaka: Fragmento*, which presented a powerful body of sculptures and installations by the Lima, Peru-based artist, and *Tapumes*, Rice University Art Gallery's mind-blowing installation by Henrique Oliveira, rounded out the list of first-rate Latin American shows.

4. Other universities also brought their A-games. Houston Baptist University presented *Virgil Grotfeldt, 274296*, a hauntingly beautiful final body of works painted on magnetic resonance imaging scans of his brain shortly before the artist's long battle with cancer ended in February. At the University of Houston, *Existed*, Blaffer Gallery's Leonardo Drew survey, conquered what may be the city's trickiest art space with Drew's monumental assemblages, and the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture hosted the fascinating *Raymond Loewy: Designs for a Consumer Culture*.

5. Houses loomed large in some of 2009's most interesting art, from Seattle choreographer Pat Graney's memory-infused *House of Mind* installation and performance at *DiverseWorks to Give and Take*, Dan Havel and Dean Ruck's architectural intervention that was the best part of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston's *No Zoning: Artists Engage Houston*. Do Ho Suh's extraordinary sculpture *Fallen Star 1/5*, which depicts the aftermath of a collision between two buildings, each a one-fifth-scale model of actual structures, is a highlight of the MFAH's *Your Bright Future: 12 Contemporary Artists From Korea* — up through Feb. 14.

6. In the galleries, *Dario Robleto: Some Longings Survive Death* united Robleto's sculptures from two West Coast museum exhibitions. His most ambitious and astonishing body of work yet remains on view by appointment through Friday at 3917 Main, a temporary Inman Gallery annex space. And it's hard to lavish enough praise on Rachel Hecker's masterful paintings of handwritten lists, appointment cards, Post-it notes and other memory-laden scraps of paper in *my world is really small and you are in it* at Texas Gallery. Other gallery-

The economic doldrums of 2009 were as rough on Houston's art scene as they were on the rest of the city, but you wouldn't know that reviewing this list of highlights:

1. Asian art continued to expand its footprint at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. In addition to completing the third of five new permanent Asian spaces — the Nidhika and Pershant Mehta Arts of India gallery — the MFAH co-organized an impressive slate of traveling exhibitions. Houstonians were especially lucky to see two shows made possible by the heroic efforts of a dedicated few — *Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures From the National Museum, Kabul* and *Arts of Ancient Viet Nam: From River Plain to Open Sea*. The latter is on view through Jan. 3. The MFAH also made a landmark acquisition of 300 photographs by Ishimoto Yasuhiro, a key figure in both Japanese and American post-World War II photography, and mounted the first of three planned exhibitions exploring the newly acquired works.

2. Both the MFAH and the Menil Collection refreshed their permanent-collection spaces with important loans we should all hope eventually become acquisitions. Jackson Pollock's *The Blue Unconscious* (1946) is the best painting in the MFAH's mid-20th-century gallery. The Menil's Franklin Sirmans, who departs soon for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, enhanced his inspired overhaul of the modern and contemporary galleries with major loans, including the Robert Rauschenberg "combine" *Third Time Painting* (1961), Jasper Johns' seminal 1963 *Periscope* (*Hart Crane*) and *Deadeye* (2002), an exquisite Martin Puryear sculpture.

3. Latin American art had another great year in Houston. The MFAH rethought its holdings in the stunning *North Looks South: Building the Latin American Collection* and collaborated with the Menil to present the revelatory *Joaquin Torres-García: Constructing Abstraction With Wood*, which is on view through Jan. 3. Sicardi Gallery explored the Uruguayan master's influence in *Constructivism in Relief: Taller Torres-García*, while the chance

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show standouts included *Howard Sherman: When gorillas shoot pigs* at McMurtrey Gallery; *Jonathan Leach: New Work* at Gallery Sonja Roesch; *Toil and Trouble*, a CTRL Gallery group show; and Elaine Bradford's hilariously surreal *Museum of Unnatural History* at the nonprofit Art League Houston.

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