

Emily Watlington, "The 100 Best Artworks of the 21st Century," *ARTnews*, March 5, 2025

**ARTnews** Est. 1902

## The 100 Best Artworks of the 21st Century



**BY** The Editors of ARTnews, Art in America  
March 5, 2025

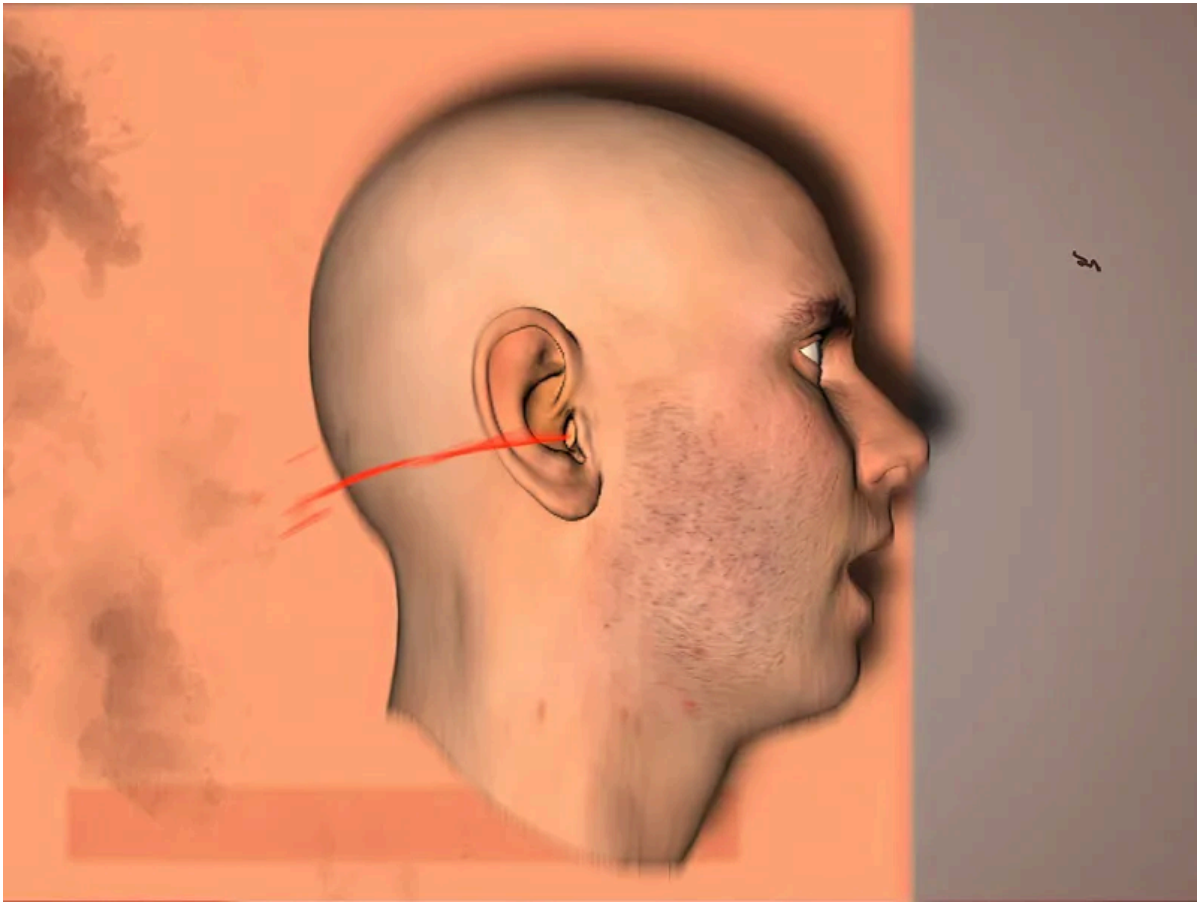
A global recession, a pandemic, 9/11, the Arab Spring, Brexit, the rise of Web 2.0, unrest in the face of economic stability, wars in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Gaza, and elsewhere: these were but a few of the many events that have defined the past 25 years, a period characterized by tumult and uncertainty. That all may explain why art appeared to change faster than ever all the while, with artists burning through styles and tendencies with each coming year.

With the 21st century now at the quarter point, we've taken the opportunity to pinpoint the **greatest artworks** of the past 25 years. It was no small task—one made more difficult by the restless creativity of artists during this period.

The joy of an epic list like this one is that it can't encapsulate everything: we know we've left some artworks off, simply because there was no shortage to choose from. We hope you'll discover some amazing pieces here, reflect on some the merits of others. And moreover, we hope to learn of new artworks through the conversations we hope our list inspires.

Below, a look back at the greatest 100 artworks of the 21st century so far, as selected by the editors of ARTnews and Art in America.

## 57 **Ed Atkins, *Us Dead Talk Love*, 2012**



**Ed Atkins: *Us Dead Talk Love*, 2012.**

Photo : Courtesy the artist, dépendance, Brussels, Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin, Cabinet, London, and Gladstone Gallery

When this 2-channel, 37-minute piece debuted, the animation felt frighteningly cutting-edge. Over a decade on, it's still uncanny. It's clear now that this owes less to the technology, which is already dated, than to how Atkins uses it, blending CGI's sleek hyperrealism with realism of a gritty variety. The computer-generated skinhead protagonist of *Us Dead Talk Love* has phrases tattooed on his face—they change over the video's duration, from ASSHOLE to FML to DON'T DIE. We watch him smoking, shirtless, singing a melancholy tune with lyrics proclaiming that love makes us sad, and sadness makes us drink. Scenes show a limp dick, a man passed out at the bar, words like ENFEEBLED and DISAFFECTION hovering in cheesy fonts. It's all chillingly affecting—its sadness too real, its presentation not real at all, the video's sheen incongruous with its sorrow. As ever, it's Atkins's skillful, poetic writing that carries the piece. —E.W.