

Andy Battaglia, "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. For ourselves, 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.



Matthew Barney: *CREMASTER 3*, 2002.

Photo : Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York, Brussels, and Seoul

Cremaster 3 is a strong candidate for the best movie ever about lamb-eating giants, balletically crashing cars, and Richard Serra flinging molten petroleum jelly inside one of our most august sanctuaries for the appreciation and narrativization of art. The longest feature film in a five-part cycle and the last to be released, the 3-hour fantasia plays as a sort of wordless cinematic tone poem filled with considerations of human evolution and reproduction (the “cremaster” muscle controls male testicles, and figures in the sexual differentiation of an embryo) and interconnected allusions to Matthew Barney’s expansive artistic universe. Starkly divergent vignettes vary from mysterious happenings within New York’s iconic Chrysler Building (the site of a surreal staging of six automobiles smashing into one another, over and over again) to an extravagant set piece in the Guggenheim Museum’s famous rotunda that features Busby Berkeley–style dancing, a hardcore-punk battle of the bands, and Barney himself climbing up and down the walls while interacting with a spectral woman who changes form into a cheetah. While it’s far from easy to apprehend, the film proves transfixing in its elusive and hyper-imaginative flights of fancy. —A.B.