

10 Must-See Works at Art Basel Unlimited

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Art Basel's Unlimited sector opened to VIPs this afternoon, filling 1.5 miles of wallspace with institutional-scaled works that each year make a proportionately outsized impact on collectors and curators. Curated for the sixth year by the Hirshhorn Museum's Gianni Jetzer, this edition sees 76 projects sprawled across the hangar-like hall, from emerging artist Donna Huanca's body-painted performance to a historic installation by Enrico Castellani. Indeed, there's something here for everyone—particularly if you're looking to fill a 20-meter hole in your collection.

There's a significant amount of ground to cover, so we've helped whittle things down. Here, we bring you the 10 presentations you shouldn't miss at Unlimited.

Sue Williamson, *Messages from the Atlantic Passage*, 2017

It's difficult to miss [Williamson's](#) massive installation, which includes five fishing nets, filled to the brim with glass bottles and suspended from the ceiling. Come closer and you'll find that each of the 2,000 or so bottles is inscribed with the name of a slave. According to Williamson, the work was inspired by specific voyages that were taken by slave ships from the west coast of Africa to the Americas in the 19th century. "The idea of the bottles and nets," she says, "is based on how people were treated like very cheap commodities." Each of the five nets hang atop a wooden base that is inscribed with the details of the journey, such as "Calabar, Nigeria - Havana, Cuba." Beneath the itinerary, it chillingly lists the headcount at departure and arrival: "Embarked 518, Landed 450."

Anicka Yi, *Skype Sweater*, 2010–17

Long before Yi's breakout year in 2015, or the 2016 Hugo Boss Art Prize win that landed her a bacteria-filled solo at Guggenheim Museum, she made *Skype Sweater*. The work, first shown at 179 Canal in 2010 and reprised for Unlimited, sees a giant parachute gently rise and fall, as if breathing. It's bolstered by three plinths that showcase sculptures: a see-through Longchamp handbag filled with an oozing mass, or razor blades that appear to be frozen in resin. For an artist who has so boldly staked her claim on all things bodily or unnervingly organic, the work is an exciting opportunity to see a series of ideas at their genesis.

Subodh Gupta, *Cooking the World*, 2017

In nearly the same spot where [Ai Weiwei's](#) Qing Dynasty-era house stood last year, [Gupta](#) places a building crafted from a very unlikely medium: aluminum kitchen utensils of all shapes and sizes. The Indian artist has long placed cooking—and the rituals surrounding eating—at the center of his practice. Here, beneath a roughly 20-meter canopy of flour sifters, cupcake tins, colanders, and pots scavenged from scrap yards across India, he presents a culinary performance. Fairgoers crowd around a long bar, indulging in helpings of saffron yogurt or lentil soup and helping to build an inclusive community space beneath an uncommon roof.

Mickalene Thomas, *Do I Look Like a Lady?* (*Comedians and Singers*), 2016

Walking into [Thomas's](#) two-channel film installation is like being invited into a cozy living room to celebrate the diversity of womanhood, and in particular, the many layers of black female identity. Vintage-patterned furniture, inspired by the artist's childhood, is surrounded by houseplants and stacks of books on feminism and African-American culture. Take a seat and indulge in the footage of female comedians and musicians—Whitney Houston and Josephine Baker among them—simultaneously singing, speaking, or performing across the screens.

Rob Pruitt, *Rob Pruitt's Official Art World / Celebrity Look-Alikes*, 2016/2017

If you follow [Pruitt on Instagram](#), then you're often privy to the artist's uncanny pairings of artists and their celebrity look-alikes—from [John Baldessari](#) matched with Papa Smurf to Emmanuel Perrotin and his doppelganger Serge Gainsbourg. But at Unlimited, the meme finds its footing IRL: The photographs are printed on canvas and presented as diptychs that densely fill the booth walls. It's an opportunity to pause for a chuckle over which familiar personality may or may not be the spitting image of Winona Ryder, Dr. Evil, or Uncle Jesse from *Full House*.

Boris Mikhailov, *Yesterday's Sandwich*, late 1960s–1970s

This series of photographs by [Mikhailov](#), currently representing Ukraine in the 57th Venice Biennale, is especially powerful given the era in which it was made. (At the time, the work wasn't able to be shown.) In *Yesterday's Sandwich*, the artist layers color slides of images from everyday life—nude women and beautiful landscapes among them—to create composites that speak to the multiplicity of the Soviet experience.

Enrico Castellani, *Spazio Ambiente*, 1970

How often do you get to enter a painting? This 1970 installation by [Castellani](#), comprised of interlocking canvases that fully encompass the viewer, gives you that chance. While the buzzy Italian artist is a mainstay across art fairs, this 360-degree installation lets you experience his work in a fundamentally different way. Step inside, and you'll enter a room formed by monochrome white canvases—many sporting the delicate, sculptural peaks that were Castellani's signature—that brilliantly toys with perception.

David Claerbout, *The pure necessity*, 2016

In [Claerbout's](#) provocative remake of Disney's *The Jungle Book*, you'll instantly recognize main character Baloo—but he isn't the dancing beast you first met as a kid. With *The pure necessity*, the Belgian artist has reimaged the final scene of the original 1967 animated film in more realistic terms; here, animals are seen acting like animals, bringing reality to bear on the fictional distortions of childhood. The work is an excellent teaser to the artist's current exhibition, also on view in Basel at the Schaulager. One edition of the work sold to a private foundation within the first minutes of the opening.

Donna Huanca, *Bliss (Reality Check)*, 2017



Installation view of Donna Huanca, *Bliss (Reality Check)*, 2017, presented by Peres Projects at Art Basel Unlimited, 2017. Photo by Benjamin Westoby for Artsy.



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Huanca's body-stocking-clad models have been making the international art-world rounds in performances of increasing complexity—most notably, in 2016, when her Zabludowicz Collection takeover saw a clan of painted performers ascend a three-story glass tower. At Unlimited, she debuts a new work in which lithe models, painted with splotches of natural pigments, respond to scent, sound, and sculpture. It's nearly impossible to look away, and that's the point: Lock eyes with a model and the lines between looking, and being looked at, begin to bend.

John Akomfrah, *The Airport*, 2016

Allusions to filmmaking legends Stanley Kubrick and Theo Angelopoulos come to a brilliant collision in *The Airport*, a three-screen video installation by Akomfrah that's well worth an hour of your busy Basel day. Set in southern Greece and an abandoned Athens airport, the film deftly fuses the country's past and present histories by way of Kubrick's and Angelopoulos's signature techniques, cinematic tactics to warp or distort how the viewer experiences the passing of time. Characters, locations, and histories collapse into one surreal film, in which a varied cast—a lone astronaut, a traveler with a suitcase—move in and out of reality.

—Molly Gottschalk