

Francesca Aton, "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 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.

22 LaToya Ruby Frazier, *Flint Is Family*, 2016



LaToya Ruby Frazier: *Flint Students and Community Members Outside Northwestern High School (Est. 1964) Awaiting the Arrival of President Barack Obama, May 4, 2016, Flint, Michigan, III, 2016-17.*

Photo : ©LaToya Ruby Frazier/Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery

The water crisis in the majority-Black Michigan city Flint began in 2014 and remains ongoing. That year, the water source for locals was switched from Lake Huron to the Flint River, whose contaminated flow was soon consumed as drinking water. The community was forever altered by resulting illnesses and death. To offer visual evidence of all the destruction, photographer LaToya Ruby Frazier documented the lives of those impacted by the crisis. The resulting photographs were not only touching and deeply personal but also doubled as a means of exposing environmental injustice. Initially released as a photobook, this series showed that documentary photography need not be either objective or impersonal, plotting a fresh path for this 20th-century genre in a new era. —F.A.