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Exhibitions

10 Critically Acclaimed Art Exhibitions We Wish We Saw in 2020 But Weren't Able to Because... You Know

This interminable year is finally coming to a close. But we cannot help but reflect on the great cultural moments we missed.

“Bisa Butler: Portraits”

Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, New York, and the
Art Institute of Chicago



I first discovered Bisa Butler in 2018 at the Pulse art fair in Miami. I was invited to stop by the day before the show's opening for a one-on-one tour with then-director Katelijne De Backer. When I asked her about the fair's highlights, she led me straight to the booth of New York's Claire Oliver Gallery, which had pre-sold four of Butler's figurative quilted works to museums such as the Art Institute of Chicago.

The works were stunning. Figurative compositions in boldly unconventional color combinations, made entirely of quilted fabrics, they were a powerful argument for the worth of a traditionally marginalized medium. Butler uses thousands of tiny pieces of vibrantly patterned African fabrics to create striking portraits based on historical photographs of Black men, women, and children, celebrating both African American quilting traditions and Black identity.

It was the best thing I saw at any of Art Basel's satellite fairs that year. Two years later, I was so excited to learn that a whole show of her work was coming to the Katonah Museum of Art that I highlighted it as an exhibition to watch in a story we published on March 9—the second-to-last day I went into the office, shortly before our worlds were turned upside down.

The show's opening was delayed until July, but by the time I felt safe enough to venture out, there were no tickets available in a time slot that worked for me. After closing in early October, it traveled to the Art Institute of Chicago, where it is on view until April 19. So there's still a glimmer of hope for me—but I'm not holding my breath.

—*Sarah Cascone*