

ARTS & LIFE



BRUNO SCHLUMBERGER/OTTAWA CITIZEN

Jonathan Hobin's loving, intimate portraits of his grandparents were remarkably lifelike.

Big Beat: Loving portraits

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7 Extreme Self (SAW Gallery): Jason St-Laurent's debut exhibition as curator at SAW Gallery brought together self-portraits by artists cast in ice-cream (Theo Pelmus) or submerged in swamps (Anitti Laitinen). Suzy Lake stood motionless in the forest, 2Fik cast himself as gay Muslim man, and Chris Burden made TV ads that took self-promotion to new levels. The show was hilarious, tragic and provocative.

8 Jonathan Hobin (City Hall Art Gallery): Hobin's meticulous photographs of his grandparents, titled *Little Lady*, *Little Man*, made voyeurs of all who saw them. The centrepiece was a large, proud portrait of the couple in their Sunday best, remarkably lifelike when printed in UV ink on aluminum panels. Most challenging were the images of Hobin's grandmother on her death bed. They were loving portraits from a photographer with

a distinct eye.

9 Amy Schissel (Patrick Mikhail Gallery): Abstract art is like a force of nature, and the artist's job is to control that force just enough to make it coherent. Amy Schissel paints images of cyberspace, of the Internet, cast as a swirl of vibrant colours. Her show *Systems Fever* at Patrick Mikhail Gallery showed that the concept works better in large format than in small, but left little doubt as to why she was shortlisted for the RBC Canadian painting prize.

10 Majestic (National Gallery): Michel de Broin's giant sculpture, made of lamp posts uprooted by hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, is playful and profound, and the best part of the Builders biennial of contemporary Canadian art. *Majestic* is sobering and uplifting at the same time. It was installed only recently and if I'd had more time to spend with it might be higher on this list. Regardless, it's

imaginative, reflective and accessible — ideal for an outdoor piece at a public institution.

A few other things that deserve special mention from the Ottawa art scene in 2012 ...

I won't soon forget seeing Howie Tsui's works on the War of 1812, from drawings on deer hide to a refurbished pinball machine. Kristy Gordon's portraits at Cube Gallery showed a young artist who continues to probe, to learn, to impress. Lorena Zirraldo's painting *She Whispered*, at Wallack Gallery in November, was as good as any I saw in a commercial gallery in Ottawa this year. Adad Hannah's video installation *the Bourgeois of Calais*, at the Ottawa Art Gallery, was destabilizing and compelling. Finally, Andrea Stokes' exhibition at the Hintonburg Public House was a moving record of her young daughters, and their lives in the wake of the sudden death of their father. It was art as both therapy and testament.



JULIE OLIVER/OTTAWA CITIZEN

David Fels created a majestic sculpture from a rotting 300-year-old oak that had to be cut down in Old Ottawa South.