

FRIEZE

The Ten Best Shows in the Americas of 2025

From a major Jack Whitten retrospective at MoMA to a storytelling-focused SITE Santa Fe International, these are this year's standout exhibitions



BY CASSIE PACKARD IN CRITICS GUIDES | 17 DEC 25



Bertolt Brecht's adage about singing in dark times hovers around the edges of this list of great shows in a distinctly grim year. At The Brick and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, the long-awaited 'MONUMENTS' foregrounded ongoing debates over the fate of Confederate statues; Nicole Eisenman's show at 52 Walker, New York, reckoned with some of the thorny conditions that artists face today; the first major institutional survey devoted to Wafaa Bilal, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, skewered the violences of neocolonialism; and a solo presentation of work by Carl Cheng at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, cast a gimlet eye on the complexities of the anthropocene. In no particular order, here are some of the standout exhibitions of 2025.



Derek Fordjour, 'Nightsong', 2025, exhibition view. Courtesy: David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles; photograph: Jeff McLane

Derek Fordjour's evenings-only exhibition 'Nightsong' was a beautiful gesture in a regressive moment. The show paid homage to legacies of Black music in the US: honouring those who have made it, danced to it, loved it, preserved it and passed it on. Bringing together work in media as varied as sculpture, painting, video and performance, the dimly lit show featured a four-hour soundscape and a forested exhibition design – made with architect Kulapat Yantrasast and design studio WHY – evoking 'hush harbours', or secret meeting places frequented by enslaved Black Americans. 'Nightsong' was collaborative in spirit and in practice, from Fordjour's painted 'covers' of artworks that depict musicians by figures like Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden, to a video installation made with Kya Lou that features some 6,000 archival clips.

Main image: Nicole Eisenman, 'STY', 2025–6, exhibition view. Courtesy: 52 Walker, New York
