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## Best of 2012

Travis Diehl



**Michael Heizer's *Levitated Mass* being transported by truck to the Los Angeles Country Museum of Art, 2012.** (Photo: Cathy Cole)

**THE FIRST ARTIST** was probably a trickster scratching footprints in the dirt—or so wrote British Minimalist Bob Law in his 1964 essay "The Necessity of Magic in Art." Fast-forward to Los Angeles in 2012, where the "tricksters" of the 1960s and '70s exerted an unusual gravity. At Philipp Kaiser and Miwon Kwon's "Ends of the Earth" at MOCA Geffen, the sound track of Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson's *Mono Lake*, 1968–2004, overwhelmed the industrial-scale gougings with schmaltzy piano arpeggios every fifteen minutes, while for gutsy simplicity nothing came close to Agnes Denes's tubular map projection (*The Hot Dog*, 1974) at the Santa Monica Museum of Art. Most surprising, though, was a quietly wise Bob Law show at Redling Fine Art containing a single work: *Castle XXXIX*, 1976, a big white canvas with a near-perfect but skewed rectangle in ballpoint pen around its perimeter—another iteration in a flawed series. As Law wrote, the old alchemists knew lead would never be gold. But to continue their work in a superstitious age and not be thought mad, they needed a cover story.

Dozens of artisans from Chiapas, Mexico, collaborated with Rigo 23 on "Autonomous InterGalactic Space Program" at REDCAT to represent the Internet-age agrarian politics of the Zapatistas, a militant alter-globalization group. Paintings and embroidery decked makeshift alleyways and bunkers with the symbols of the movement: the neoliberal dragon clutching earth in its talons; mothers, children, snails, and ears of corn wearing black balaclavas. An intricate wooden model of a bird-shaped rocket dangled in the machine-chilled air of the exhibition's central room. Here, at the known limits of political art, interstellar crops and homegrown spaceships served as metaphoric vehicles; celestial utopian desire met the hard facts of a ground revolution.

In February, as Michael Heizer's pet megalith, *Levitated Mass*, trundled from Riverside toward LACMA with its utility truck entourage, folks in their bathrobes on their front lawns wondered if all those millions couldn't have been better spent. But the crudely shelved Mass was soon overshadowed courtesy of another acronym: NASA. Space shuttle *Endeavor* piggybacked on a 747 for a low-altitude farewell flyover of Los Angeles County before parading from LAX to its retirement home outside the California Science Center. Once-in-a-lifetime photos showed the orbiter filling living room windows or passing inches from small trees being bent back by workers—even being towed over a bridge by a Toyota pickup. As it marked the end of an era, this majestic, bittersweet, and comic homecoming reminded us that even if earthly reality proves too strong to escape, we'd be crazy not to try.

*Travis Diehl is an artist and writer who lives in Los Angeles. He edits the arts journal Prism of Reality.*