

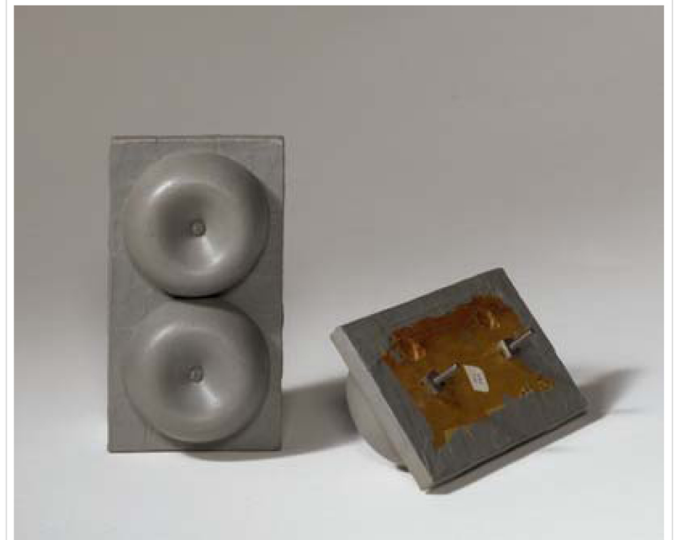
December 29, 2010

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Another year, another whole lot of art. Here's the best of what I saw — which was a lot, but not everything, so don't take it as gospel — in very loose order.

1. *At Work: Hesse, Goodwin, Martin*, the Art Gallery of Ontario

The AGO confused audiences this year with an overwhelmingly full and scattershot schedule. The lingering Tut extravaganza and the V&A's *Maharaja* bookended the year, with a dog's breakfast of contemporary, historical, photography, painting, sculpture, performance and installation wedged in between. It covered the gamut of the good (Shary Boyle's *Flesh and Blood*, the Art Institute of Chicago's *Playing with Pictures*) the head-scratching (Wangechi Mutu, *Drama and Desire*) and the painfully awful (*Julian Schnabel: Art and Film*), but if there's a single standout, for me it was the tri-part exhibition of the work of Agnes Martin, Eva Hesse and Betty Goodwin. While the conceit linking the three was — pardon the pun — mildly laboured (it intended to link the studio practices of the three woman artists, though Martin's portion had little, if anything to do with this), the show itself sang: intimate, frank and infused with equal parts good humour and angst. Its range — from Goodwin's neurotically self-immolating journals through Hesse's gleeful material experiments on through the stark serenity of Martin's canvases (the AGO borrowed *The Islands* from the Whitney in New York, a 12-part series of majestic understatement in hues of white) — could keep you there for hours.

Eva Hesse's *Studiowork*, 1966

HANDOUT PHOTO

2. *Traffic: Conceptualism in Canada*, organized (in part) by the University of Toronto galleries

I know, I know: Conceptualism? Top 10? Seriously? Very. The show is the product of years of research by collaborating curators at universities and museums coast to coast, which would be enough for anyone to fear academic stultification, but the truth is you're not apt to find a more comprehensive, intellectually sound, exhaustive, engaging and fantastically fun exhibition in Canada — or most other places — this year. Or even next, I'd guess: *Traffic* unearths Canada's connection to probably the second-most important moment in 20th-century art history (let's surrender No. 1 to Cubism, with its lead-in to abstraction, for the sake of argument) and sites our country in what was likely the first truly international art revolution. For all it has to teach, which is a lot, *Traffic* never feels like a lesson. Instead, it's a revelation of delights, served as a smorgasbord that anyone with even a passing interest in Canadian art will hungrily consume

3. *The Dead*, **Jack Burman**, Clint Roenisch Gallery

It is what it says: For the past 30 years, Jack Burman has been making photographs of the preserved remains of human beings from what he calls "the sensual world": those decidedly non-Protestant cultures that value the body, living or dead, as something more than the earthly carrying case for the soul. Burman's images shock, arrest, confront, provoke and hint at the sublime reality of the physical equal to the spiritual hereafter we all crave.