Fred Tomaselli

Fred Tomaselli is an artist based in New York. His paintings and collages have been exhibited at such institutions as the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Rose Art Museum, Wellesley, MA; and the Aspen Art Museum. A survey of his work is currently on view at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, through March 23. This May, Prestel will publish The Times, a book comprising Tomaselli’s recent series of manipulated New York Times front pages.

1. THE MUSEUM OF MICROMINIATURES (HOLLYWOOD) Last year, I visited this Soviet-era museum dedicated to the work of Nikolai Surkin. Set within the campus of a twelfth-century Orthodox monastery, it houses rows of microscopes focused on tiny sculptures, such as a real flea shot in golden show or a carved-glass map of Australia set within half a poppy seed. My favorite is Rose Inside a Hair, which consists of a microscopic, long-stemmed rose inserted into a clear, hollowed-out strand of hair. I thought it was a hoax until I pulled away from the microscope and squinted to see the tiny hair lying on the slide tray.

2. SNOWY OWL, IRUPTION This winter saw the largest invasion of snowy owls ever recorded in New York City. Facing dire conditions in their Arctic home, these hungry raptors came here looking for food and immediately took up residence at local airports, which, to them, resemble the tundra. As first, airport officials responded by shooting the birds, but the ensuing outcry forced them to end the slaughter and remove the creatures humanely. Watching these huge white owls attempting to pick off urban rabbits at the decommissioned runways of Floyd Bennett Field was like experiencing a visitation from another dimension.

3. OFF AND XENIA RUBINSKY Black Flag was never more intense than when Keith Morris found the band some thirty-five years ago. Now he’s back with a new group of LA stalwarts, and the project is as fuzzy, angry, and powerful as anything he’s ever done. Like Black Flag, Off! (also named after an insecticide) comes recorded in Raymond Pettibon’s wonderfully dyspeptic drawings. The band’s last blast of noise is like a pot of coffee poured directly into the cauldron. But if some aggression is not your cup of tea, you might try Xenia Rubinos’s “Flamboyant” from her terrific debut album, Magic Trick: Da Da Beng, 2013. With the help of drummer Marco Bucci and her crazy synapses, she manages voice balance between Latin, pop, and experimental while always maintaining super raunch.

4. ROBERT IRWIN, SCRIM VEE—BLACK RECTANGLE—NATURAL LIGHT WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, NEW YORK, 1977. Of all the excellent work from California that flooded New York last summer, this legendary reclamation of space was one of my favorites. With almost nothing, and no electricity, Irwin transformed not just the Whitney’s fourth-floor gallery, but perception itself. Every visit yielded a new revelation.

Tomaselli, Fred, “Top Ten,” Artforum, March 2014
5. RICH MOODY, THE FOUR FINGERS OF DEATH (LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY, 2010). Moody’s latest novel is the funniest, darkest, and most true-to-life novel I’ve read all year. Huge and sprawling, it bravely shreds up narrative, vacillating between the cosmic and the comic yet remaining deeply moving. Yet in the near future of lowered expectations, it’s an ambitious read and worth every word.

6. "404 E 54TH" (TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY, NEW YORK) Carved by artist Tom Bierich, this exhibition explored the history of one East Village building’s inhabitants to find a universe of undergrounds spreading out from its foundation. Through the work of Allen Ginsberg, Jean Dupuy, Claes Oldenburg, Yoko Ono, Richard Ham, Walter Robinson, Kathy Binsky, Fred Wilson, Whitfield Lovell, and others, this act of urban anthropology revealed a palimpsest of happenings, poetry, music, and art. It’s exactly the kind of New York I once dreamed of.

7. THE ACT OF KILLING (2012). Joshua Oppenheimer’s harrowing documentary follows a group of aging murderers as they reenact their participation in the killing and torture spree that ravaged Indonesia in the mid-1960s. These remorseless thugs model themselves after characters from American gangster movies while attempting to make their own film about their real-life pages of cruelty. Following decades of suppressed trauma, the catharsis that unfolds is devastating.

8. THE HARVARD REVIEW: "DRUGS AND THE MIND" (SUMMER 1963). This issue of the journal, which featured Henry Kourser as a faculty board member, features the early research on psychedelics that was coming out of Cambridge, Massachusetts, right before all hell broke loose. With essays by Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert (Ram Dass), anthropologists Andrew Weil, and ethnobotanists Richard Schultes and R. Gordon Wasson, plus a thoughtful review of the then-banned Nakal Dowell (1939), and "before-and-after" artwork by Arthur Houser, it was one of the first publications to map the emerging frontier of chemical propulsion through inner space.

9. YETI RECORDS. Mike McGonigal, founding editor of Yeti magazine, recently completed a pressing of small-batch records for a club powered by listener subscribes. His mix of punk, gospel, psych, blues, and general weirdness has always been illuminating and is often sublime. Based in Portland, Oregon, he will soon decamp to Detroit to start another series, intuition the small vinyl-record plants that still dot the city. In the meantime, check out the latest blues of “Rattle the Bones,” a track by one-man band Amber Jay. I’ve watched two-year-olds furiously dance to this song.

10. THE GIFTS OF THE STATE: NEW AFGHAN WRITING (ADAM NEIM, ED. ZEROUNI, 2013). This remarkable collection of short fiction came out of a series of writing workshops conducted in Kabul by musician and author Adam Klein. By turns horrific, comedic, surreal, and sly, this book reminds us that Afghanistan is inhabited by a multiplicity of individuals and is not just an arena for a clash of civilizations. History may be written by the winners, but this book offers the rare experience of encountering young voices—side by side and in direct conflict—scripting history as it unfolds.