

# ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

## Best Visual Arts of 2007

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POST-DISPATCH VISUAL ARTS CRITIC  
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### ART

Of course, it's what's in all those buildings that makes people want to go to them in the first place. And I mean the art, not the restaurant or the gift shop or how short the wait for the ladies room is.

During the past year, the art offerings at local museums and galleries were often very good.

Looming over everything was Napoleon Bonaparte, whose style was the subject of "Symbols of Power: Napoleon and the Art of Empire Style, 1800-1815," which filled the St. Louis Art Museum through the summer with high-style furniture, ceramics, metalwork, clothing and memorabilia of a self-crowned emperor.

Befitting a regime that existed only because of force of arms, the Empire style that Napoleon promoted was sober, masculine and militaristic. Although the butterfly and the swan were used stylistically to soften the edges, the feminine principle was largely crushed by the weight of the Empire's constant warfare.

But on other fronts here, it could be said that 2007 was "The Year of the Woman." There were outstanding solo exhibitions by: conceptual provocateur Andrea Fraser

at the Kemper; environmental sculptors Katie Holten and Maya Lin, both, separately, at the Contemporary; political conceptualist Beate Engle at Boots Contemporary Art Space; dynamic draftswomen Joyce Pensato and Alice Maher, both at Schmidt Contemporary Art; surrealist object maker Karyn Olivier at Laumeier; word/image artist Lesley Dill at COCA; painter Angelina Gualdoni at SLAM; local paper artist **Joan Hall at Bruno David**; and rubber tire sculptor Chakaia Booker at UMSL's Gallery 210.

There were outstanding images by female artists in group shows as well. Who can forget Janine Antoni's provocative photograph of her mother, "Momme" (1995)? Dreamily looking out the window, the barefoot matriarch has three feet emerging from her loose gauzy white gown. At the same time you notice the third foot, you realize that the lump in her lap turns out to be her daughter, the photographer, exhibiting a return-to-the-womb desire in a psychologically jolting way. Antoni's image was in "Shoot the Family," a traveling photography show at the Contemporary. Although most of the work included aimed to create a frisson surrounding family issues, nothing else was as memorable.