

## Death of visionary rattled arts scene - Works by the imaginative Cassilly are found all over St. Louis; Contemporary director Paul Ha moves on. - YEAR IN REVIEW - VISUAL ARTS

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St. Louis' visual arts calendar was packed with high-profile shows ("Monet's Water Lilies," "Reflections of the Buddha") and dozens of openings that introduced audiences to new works and artists. The biggest news this year came in September, with the unexpected death of Bob Cassilly. Here are the highlights of 2011:

Top story - The shocking death of City Museum co-founder Bob Cassilly at 61 devastated not just St. Louis' creative class but all who were taken by his whimsical imagination, outrageous vision and rebellious persona. Cassilly's work is everywhere, from the St. Louis Zoo, Turtle Park and Faust Park to the St. Louis Galleria and countless other venues.

His greatest legacy is the City Museum, a fun house of discarded fire trucks, neon signs and mouse cages. On its opening in 1997, the utterly unique museum lured locals back downtown, where we discovered St. Louis was way cooler than we thought - as did the fawning travel writers who came to see our city in a new light.

Cassilly died in September in a tractor accident at Cementland. Cassilly and his devoted crew were transforming the 55-acre site of a former cement operation into an outdoor amusement park of moats, castles and walkways. The news of his death was surprising yet predictable; Cassilly was known for working without permits or regard for personal safety. Also predictable: Cassilly left no will, further complicating the fate of Cementland. Still, family and crew members promise the project will be realized, though no one knows when. Cassilly's original plan was to open Cementland in 2010.

Moving on, moving in - After boosting the Contemporary's profile, programming and budget, inaugural director Paul Ha departed in November for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's List Visual Arts Center in Cambridge, Mass.

Ha championed cutting-edge art, showcasing more than 100 artists from across the globe during his nine-year tenure. He also supported local arts, establishing the Great Rivers Biennial, sponsoring a summer tour of St. Louis studios and hosting parties and events for artists and art lovers.

The Contemporary has hired a Connecticut-based firm to conduct a nationwide search for Ha's replacement. Ha thinks the museum will have its pick of candidates.

"We have really arrived," he said in November. "This is a huge opportunity to get someone fantastic for the Contemporary."

Meanwhile, Kristina Van Dyke was named director of the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, replacing Matthias Waschek, coming from the Menil Collection in Houston, where she was curator for collections and research.

At SLAM - The St. Louis Art Museum offered engaging - but small - exhibits while construction continues on its expansion. "Monet's Water Lilies" reunited the three parts of a long-separated triptych painted from 1915 to 1926, the year Monet died. "Water Lilies" which also features large-scale studies for the triptych as well as a trio of paintings from private collections, debuted in Kansas City and travels from here to Cleveland. ("Monet's Water Lilies" runs through Jan. 22.)

Another exhibit was even more practical: Conservator Paul Haner and assistants restored part of "The Panorama of the Monumental Grandeur of the Mississippi River Valley" over the summer as museum visitors watched. "Fiery Pool: The Maya and the Mythic Sea" delved into Maya culture, politics and spirituality with more than 90 works.

Crews have nearly completed exterior work on SLAM's \$130 million expansion. The 200,000-square-foot addition, designed by renowned architect David Chipperfield, will include new galleries, an underground parking garage and a restaurant. Meanwhile, museum curators reinstalled a number of galleries, giving old favorites new meaning and context.

Other venues - In "Reflections of the Buddha," the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts mounted one of the most effective exhibitions in its 10-year history. Senior curator Francesca Herndon-Consagra used the Tadao Ando-designed building to set off works ancient and modern, from across Asia and beyond. (On view through March 10.)

"Ghost: Elizabeth Peyton" at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum assembled more than four dozen works by the art-world star and heir

to Andy Warhol, mingling her images of celebrities with portraits of ordinary people.

The Sheldon Art Galleries' offering "Ralston Crawford and Jazz," featuring New Orleans-themed photographs, prints, paintings, drawings and films, made a strong case for the Canadian-born artist Crawford as a practitioner of modernism. (The exhibition closes Jan. 7.)

White Flag Projects showcased work by video artist and St. Louis native Amy Granat, including silent films that suggested what Jackson Pollock might have come up with had he worked with film instead of paint.

"Dog Days of Summer" at Laumeier Sculpture Park addressed the relationship between dogs and humans through visual art dating from the 18th century to the present; it included works by 10 artists, from bygone painters Richard Cosway and Charles Hamilton to contemporary favorites Jeff Koons and William Wegman.

Russian-born artist Ludmila Pawlowska's "Icons in Transformation," at Christ Church Cathedral (through Jan. 15) put religiously inspired (and thought-provoking) images into one of the city's most beautiful holy spaces.

Other news - Cherokee Street further established itself as the place to see great local art, as well as to find an authentic taco. The gritty strip, long home to St. Louis Hispanics, continued to draw young artists. They opened studios and galleries and threw art-inspired parties and events such as the Clean Up, the inaugural St. Louis Arts Project Conference and annual Cherokee Print League show.

In December, the founders of the Luminary Arts Center announced plans to move their thriving 5-year-old project to the old Globe Drug store, where they will house visiting artists, expand the Luminary's equipment library and host hot indie concerts.

The Missouri Botanical Garden announced plans to stage a lantern festival, featuring large-scale works of art by 40 Chinese artists. Scheduled to open in May, the exhibition will feature glowing sculptures of Chinese pandas, dragons and cherry blossoms as well as a three-story replica of Beijing's 15th century Heavenly Temple.

Common in China, this will be America's first major lantern festival, organizers say.

"It's going to be enormously exciting and gratifying to see what people can still do with their hands," producer Joe Tavares said. "We're so consumed with computers and robotics, but this is truly about celebrating the artist and connection between the art and the natural beauty of the garden."

- Caption: Post-Dispatch file photo Bob Cassilly uses a trowel to shape the new concrete head on a snake in 2007 at Turtle Park in St. Louis. St. Louis art museum "Temple of the Sun by Sunset," a scene from "The Panorama of the Monumental Grandeur of the Mississippi River Valley" by John J. Egan. The mural was restored at the St. Louis Art Museum while visitors watched. Junius Beebe "Standing Prince Shotoku at Age Two (Shotoku Taishi Nisaizo)," c. 1292, Japan, part of the Pulitzer Foundation's "Reflections of the Buddha" exhibit. From Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum.

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