

Art

The Best Public Art of 2018

Scott Indrisek Dec 12, 2018 4:30 pm



For the third year running, the art-and-design studio and foundry UAP has compiled a list of the most compelling public artworks and initiatives around the globe. (UAP has itself helped make possible many impactful projects recently, from Ai Weiwei’s “Arch: Good Fences Make Good Neighbors” to a Zaha Hadid–designed hotel in China.) With the help of international curators, UAP has highlighted 12 public works that captured the world’s imagination in 2018. We present their selections here, with exclusive commentary on each project from the curators who nominated the projects in question.

Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Untitled 2018 The Infinite Dimensions of Smallness*, Singapore





“This site-specific installation commissioned for the Ng Teng Fong Roof Garden at the National Gallery of Singapore references both the city’s regional-specificity and status as an international hub,” says Alexie Glass-Kantor, executive director of Sydney’s Artspace.

“Situated in central Singapore and framing the urban skyline, Rirkrit Tiravanija’s large-scale bamboo structure acts as a porous, labyrinthine border between its public surrounds and the intimate rituals of a Japanese teahouse nestled in its centre. Utilized as a space for both private and collaborative encounters, Tiravanija draws on regional architecture, ritual, and tradition to craft a space that thoughtfully exemplifies the subtle intricacies of globalized, socially engaged art practice today. What the artist describes as ‘the infinite dimensions of smallness’ has a vast poetic and reflective quality that draws the audience into an enigmatic entanglement of space and place elegantly dislodged from the everyday.”

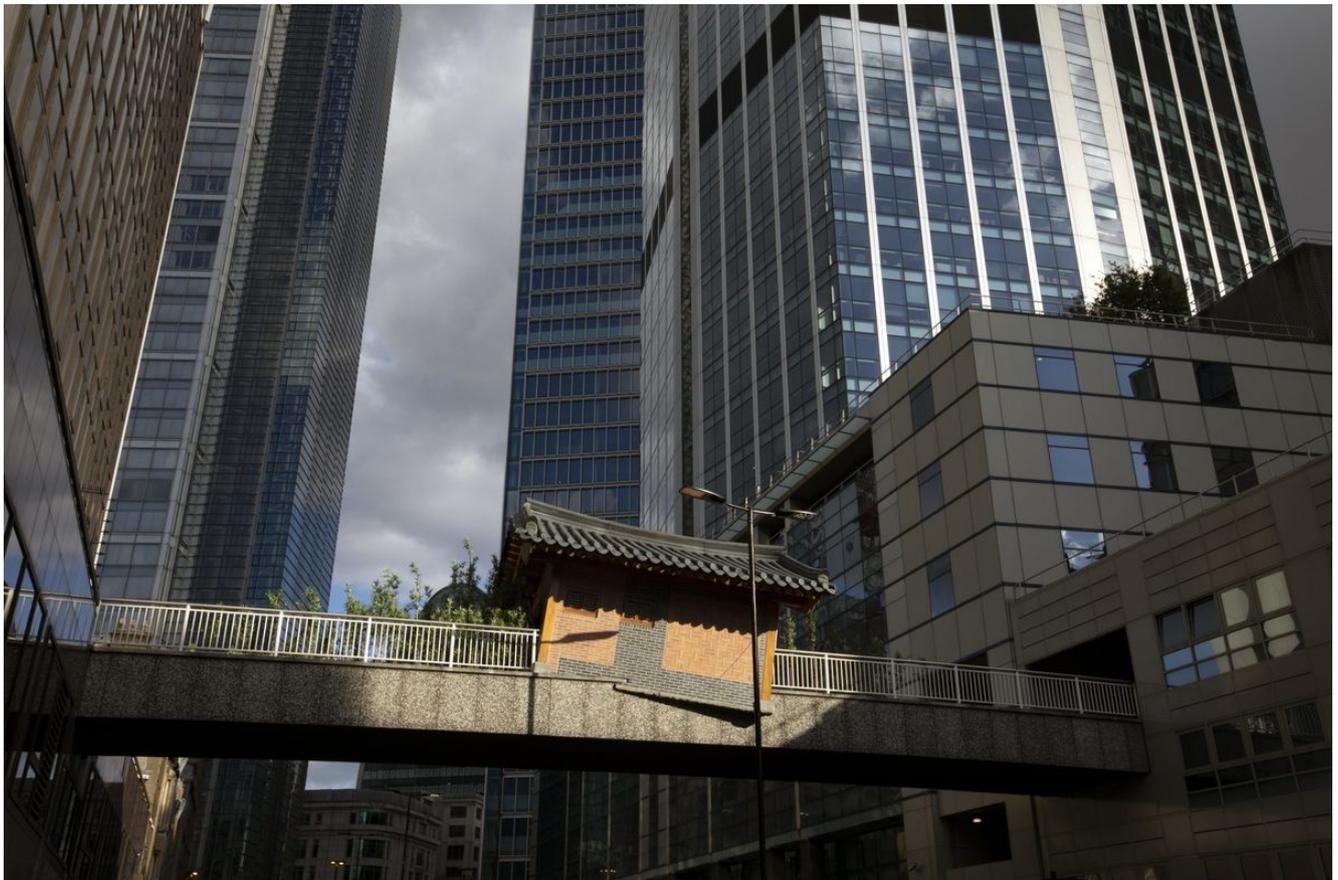
Callum Morton, *Monument #32 Helter Shelter, Sydney*



“The proverb and curse ‘may you live in interesting times’ comes to head-on fruition in Callum Morton’s sculpture, commissioned by Sydney Contemporary for the Barangaroo Precinct,” Glass-Kantor says. “In reference to the social, cultural, and political traumas plaguing the Trump era, Morton highlights the ripple effects of the U.S. president’s unnerving presence and constructs a topical, politically charged public art installation. Passersby literally stop in their tracks as they encounter the unmistakably tangerine features of

the president rising from the pavement, grafted into a Frankenstein mix of theme-park homage and minor architecture. Morton is a deft hand at dark humour and this work plays with form and dysfunction—the front is a bravura of portraiture, whilst the reverse is a hollowed-out shelter (of sorts), offering very little reprieve from the current maelstrom of global politics. Ultimately what lies within is anyone's guess.”

Do Ho Suh, *Bridging Home*, London



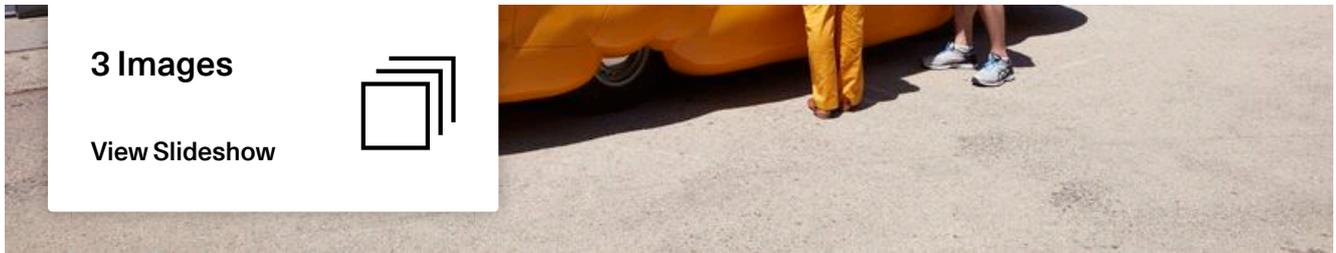
Do Ho Suh, *Bridging Home*, 2018, London. Co-commissioned by Art Night and Sculpture in the City, and curated by Fatoş Üstek. Image courtesy of the artist, Victoria Miro Gallery, and Gautier Deblonde.

“Korean-born artist Do Ho Suh’s *Bridging Home* is a deeply clever artwork,” says curator Alison Kubler. “It so aptly describes the tension between public and private space in the sense that it is at once both: a home on a public thoroughfare. Installed on a pedestrian bridge in London’s heart, *Bridging Home*—a replica of a traditional Korean home—forms part of Sculpture in the City, and Art Night, an annual initiative that commissions site-specific artworks across the city. It is incongruous and charming and so perfectly illustrates the nuance of what defines ‘home’ as seen from the perspective of an immigrant, which, in light of the larger issues surrounding the worldwide refugee crisis, is even more timely.”

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Erwin Wurm, *Hotdog Bus*, New York City





“New York Public Art Fund’s brilliant Erwin Wurm *Hot Dog Bus* is undoubtedly one of the best artworks of the year,” said Kubler. “An excoriating comment on gluttony and greed, it is at once also a moment of unbridled joy. The work is so uniquely Wurm; I love the idea that the viewer is both a willing and guilty participant in the act of consumption. And yet, too, *Hot Dog Bus* is a deeply democratic artwork; it is imbued with grave and serious meanings at the same time that it invites one to share a moment with others, and ‘enjoy’ the moment. It perfectly embodies the notion of what public art should and could be: inclusive.”

Dorothy Iannone, *I Lift My Lamp Beside the Golden Door*, New York City





Dorothy Iannone, *I Lift My Lamp Beside the Golden Door*, 2018, New York. Image courtesy of Tim Schenck and Friends of the High Line.

“I truly love the work of Berlin-based American artist Dorothy Iannone, but it’s rarely shown in New York City,” says Emma Enderby, senior curator of The Shed in New York. “And when it is, it’s never public art. This always seemed odd to me, given that—as Robert Filou stated—‘her aim is no less than human liberation.’ That’s partly what makes Iannone’s mural, commissioned by the High Line, so exciting. It feels undeniably fresh, courageous, responsive. It features three renditions of the Statue of Liberty and the last line of Emma Lazarus’s 1883 poem ‘The New Colossus,’ which states: ‘I lift my lamp beside the golden door.’ This ode to the famed statue becomes a simple reminder of the country’s history as a welcoming place for those that needed a new home, and the reality of the state of immigration today.”

Multiple artists, Liverpool Biennial



“The 10th rendition of the Liverpool Biennial was one of the best thus far,” says Enderby. “I’ve selected the biennial as it’s a city-wide exhibition, with all artworks free and open to the public. It’s interesting to think about how biennials can be public art, acting as essential ways people can access art for free. In this year’s Liverpool Biennial, scattered throughout public spaces in the city, there were more than 40 artists from 22 countries—many of those countries in political turmoil. The exhibition reflected on contemporary crises, but also imagined a better world. For me, highlights included Abbas Akhavan’s monumental soil work, which referenced ancient sculptures destroyed by ISIS; Agnès Varda, one of the only female filmmakers to emerge from the French New Wave movement; and Mohamed Bourouissa, whose two films in the biennial are wedded to

Michael Doucoussa, whose two films in the Biennial are wedded to his community-based practice.”

Archie Moore, *United Neytions*, Sydney



Archie Moore, *United Neytions*, 2014-18, Sydney. Commissioned by Sydney Airport in partnership with The Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia. Photo by Anna Kucera. Courtesy of The Commercial Gallery, Sydney.

“*United Neytions* is a major new commission at Sydney’s International Airport, Terminal 1, comprising 28 imagined First Nations’ flags suspended from a central atrium,” explains curator Natalie King. “Moore, a Kamilaroi Aboriginal artist, reflects the diversity of

Aboriginality with over 280 language groups across Australia. Ideally situated at the airport—a place of transit and mobility—his public artwork graphically and joyfully suggests a ‘welcome to country,’ highlighting the immensity of First Nations’ histories as the original custodians of Australia for over 60,000 years.”

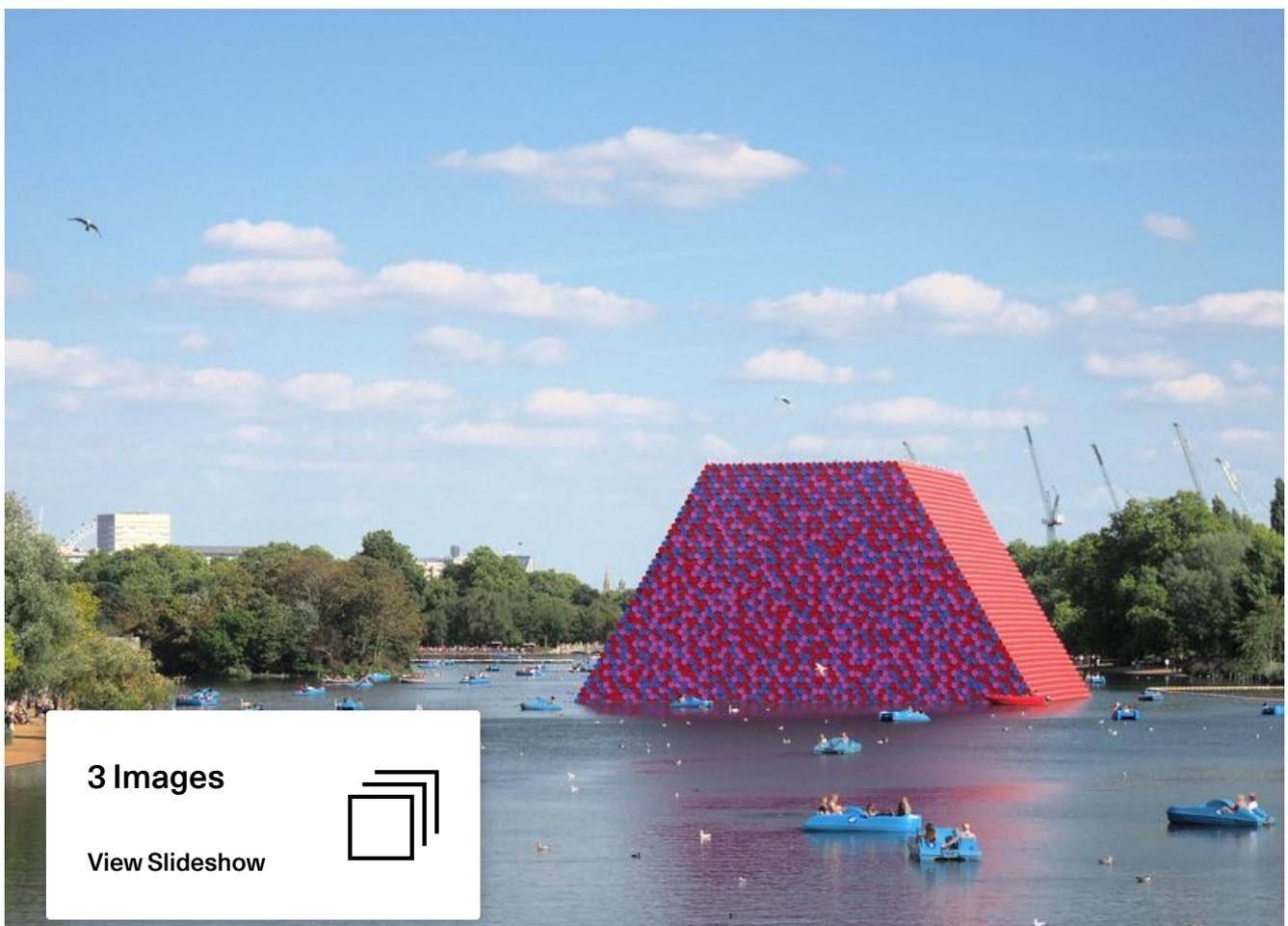
David McDiarmid, *Rainbow Aphorisms*, London

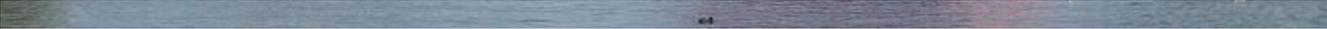


“David McDiarmid’s activist and alluring *Rainbow Aphorisms* reappear, after the artist’s death of AIDS in 1995, across the London

Underground, infiltrating the streetscape and accosting the passerby,” says King. “His witty and dazzling slogans stridently message queer identity and history, as urgent and politically astute as ever. Pithy phrases such as ‘Don’t forget to remember’ and ‘I’m too sexy for my T-cells’ are emblazoned against rainbow backgrounds, reminding us of both the AIDS crisis and the pertinence of inclusivity in contemporary society.”

Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The London Mastaba*, London





“In contrast to the glacial time frame taken to realize many of Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s major projects, *The London Mastaba* happened relatively fast,” says Nicholas Baume, director and chief curator of New York’s Public Art Fund. “Its origins, however, go way back. Oil barrels were among the first objects Christo wrapped or stacked as a young émigré artist in Paris in the late 1950s, culminating in his *Wall of Oil Barrels – Iron Curtain, Rue Visconti, Paris* (1962). It was astonishing to see the same functional, industrial objects so utterly transformed in use: from the politically inflected urban barrier of 1962 to the massive and archetypal *mastaba* form, made seemingly weightless on water, dazzling in tones of bright candy. The late work of some great artists is dark and brooding; that of others feels like an ode to joy. It was a joy to be at the Serpentine Galleries in Hyde Park this summer.”

***The Mile-Long Opera*, New York City (co-created by Diller Scofidio + Renfro and David Lang, with text by Anne Carson and Claudia Rankine. Co-produced by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, the High Line, and THE OFFICE performing arts + film)**



“It is no easy feat to create a work of art that is at once epic and intimate,” Baume says. “By the numbers, *The Mile-Long Opera* was of monumental scale: unfolding gradually, continuously, and cumulatively along a vast section of the High Line, featuring 1,000 voices singing acapella to an audience of countless New Yorkers that streamed by, like pilgrims on ritual journey by night. Thus the operatic evocation of quotidian urban life became an attenuated, immersive experience, different for everybody, since nobody could have the same experience of each singer, each text, and each location at the same time. The inspired partnership of architect Liz Diller and composer David Lang, both virtuosos in their own disciplines, generated a new model of participatory performance and audience experience that painted a captivating portrait of a remarkably diverse collectivity: New York City.”

Tauba Auerbach, *Flow Separation*, New York City

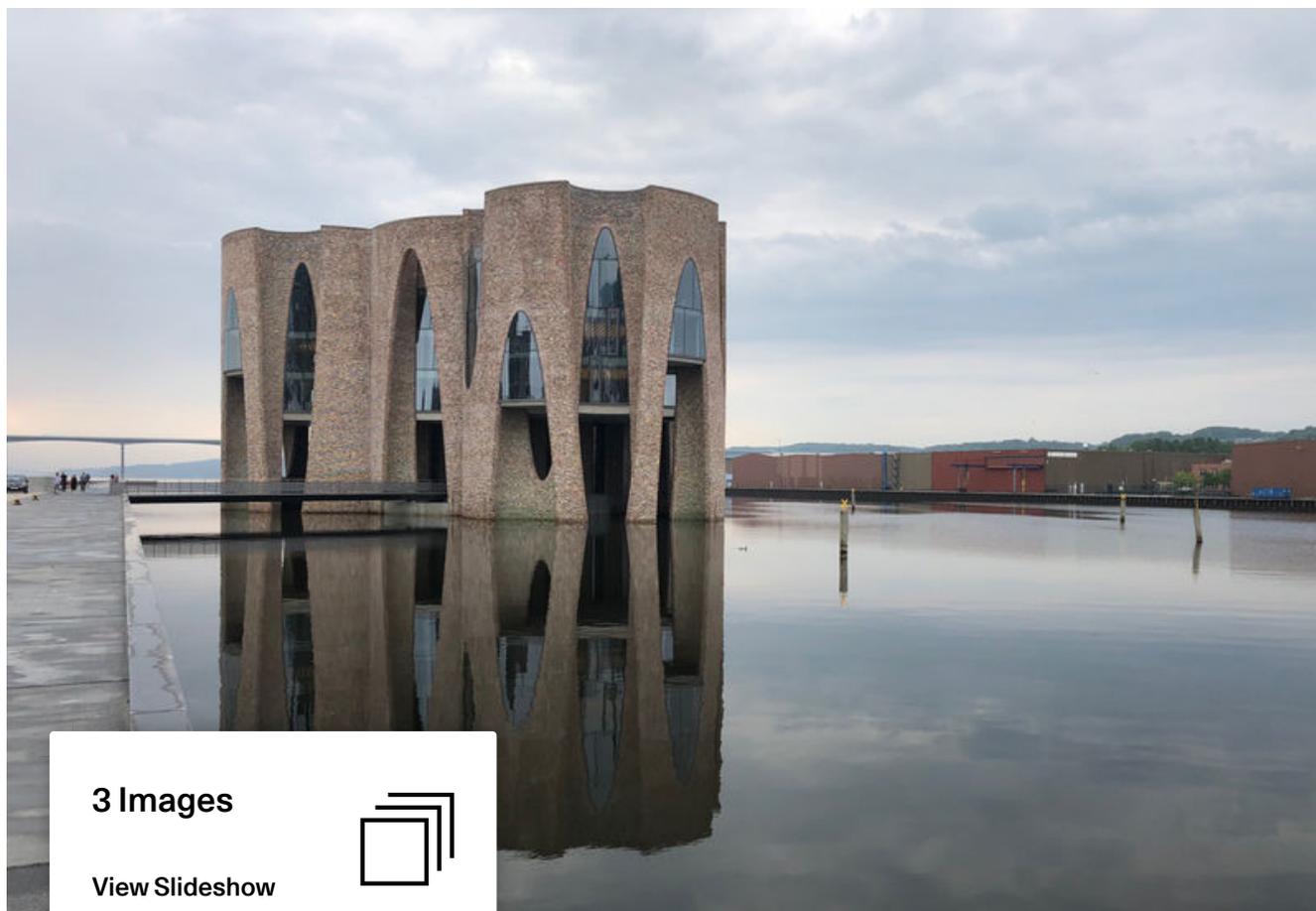


Tauba Auerbach, *Flow Separation*, 2018, New York. Photo by Nicholas Knight. Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery and Public Art Fund, NY

“Tauba Auerbach’s transformational work combines the dazzle camouflage technique invented by British painter Norman Wilkinson during World War I to confuse enemy submarines, with fluid dynamics and forms found in wake patterns left behind objects as they move through water,” say Natasha Smith and Ineke Dane, both members of FIAD’s curatorial team. “The work is not essential

members of OAR's own curatorial team. The work is at once optical and delightful, even participatory—inviting viewers to partake in boat trips on the New York harbor on board the artwork's historic vessel and canvas, the fireboat *John J. Harvey*. The work intertwines concepts of engagement, interactivity, Op art, technology, and innovation, while acting as an homage to the end of World War I (or the celebration of peace) in an unexpected, memorable and accessible way.”

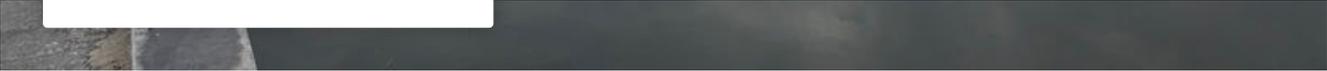
Olafur Eliasson, *Fjordenhus*, Vejle Fjord, Denmark



3 Images

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“Internationally renowned Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson has completed his first architectural project, a sculptural headquarters in the Vejle Fjord in Denmark,” say Smith and Dane. “The building was commissioned by Kirk Kapital, the holding and investment company for three brothers who are direct descendants of the founder of Lego. It is the first building entirely designed by Studio Olafur Eliasson.

“The design of the building casts nature as a hero through consideration of natural light, the weather, the seasons, and the Vejle Fjord itself, with the building sited on the water within the renowned geological formation.

“Not only is this work considered, thoughtful, and striking by design, it is a powerful testament to the skill of the creative and evidence of the current breaking-down of perceived barriers and definitions within the creative industries—simply put, the categorisation of mediums and practices continues to blur and produce compelling outcomes.”

Scott Indrisek is Artsy’s Deputy Editor.

Correction: A previous version of this article incorrectly stated that the

photograph of Anish Kapoor’s “United Nations” was by James M...

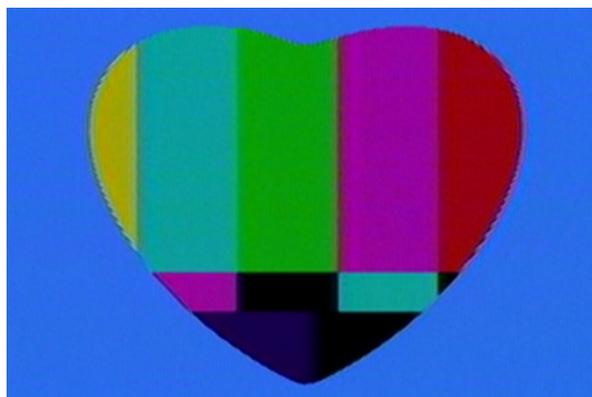
photographer of Archie Moores United Nations was Jessica Maier. Anna Kucera took the photo. The text has been updated to reflect this change.

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