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# THE DENVER POST

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## Top 10 in 2009: Art Museums' evolution, rising star Nathan Abels

By Kyle MacMillan, December 24, 2009

From key leadership changes at the Denver Art Museum to a groundbreaking for yet another major museum building, the local art scene experienced a hectic year of change and growth in 2009.

In February came the surprising news that the scrappy Lab at Belmar would merge into the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, with Adam Lerner taking the reins of the combined entity.

DAM announced in October that Christoph Heinrich, the museum's well-liked curator of modern and contemporary art, would replace Lewis Sharp, who is retiring after a 20-year tenure as director.

And less than two weeks ago, the Clyfford Still Museum took a major step forward, with an estimated 300 people attending a formal groundbreaking for its \$29 million permanent home on Bannock Street.

Here's a look at some other highlights of the year:

### Top 10 Art Shows of 2009

**"Paul Soldner Ceramics: A Master Teacher at Work,"** University of Denver, Victoria Myhren Gallery.

**"Wayne Thiebaud: 70 Years of Painting,"** Loveland Museum/Gallery.

**"The Baroque World of Fernando Botero,"** Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center.

**"Mile High and Underground,"** Byers-Evans House Gallery.

**Birger Sandzen,** David Cook Fine Art.

**Fred Tomaselli,** Aspen Art Museum.

**"Stephen Batura: Borrowing Time,"** Robischon Gallery.

**"The Masterworks of Charles M. Russell,"** Denver Art Museum.

**"Embrace!,"** Denver Art Museum.

**"Hung Liu: Apsaras,"** Fort Collins Museum of Contemporary Art.

### Art Space of Year: Plus Gallery

The 8-year-old gallery reopened in March in a New York-chic, two-story space at 2501 Larimer St. A stand-out exhibition of geometric abstractions by Karen McClanahan inaugurated the new location, and strong exhibitions kept coming all year, featuring such artists as Jenny Morgan and Bill Amundson.

### Curator of the Year: Christoph Heinrich

Heinrich won the same honor last year, but it's virtually impossible not to bestow it on him again for his realization of "Embrace!" The exhibition of edgy installations by 17 artists from around the world is the most ambitious and internationally significant contemporary exhibition in Denver in at least a decade.

### **Artist of the Year: John McEnroe**

McEnroe has been a highly visible figure on the Denver art scene for several years, but his contribution to "Embrace!" could be the ticket to the broader recognition this big-thinking artist deserves. His installation, "The Bathers," is among the most striking and conceptually sound works in the massive show.

### **Emerging Artist of the Year: Nathan Abels**

Abels, a promising 29-year-old artist who moved to Denver in 2007, grabbed the local art scene's attention in January with a solo exhibition of paintings at Rule Gallery that exuded an alluring sense of emotional detachment and mystery. An additional boost came last spring when Heinrich awarded him a juror honorable mention at the Foothills Art Center's "Colorado Art Open."