

The 100 Greatest New York City Artworks, Ranked



When the artist Florine Stettheimer returned from a sojourn in Europe during the 1910s, she vowed to paint New York City as she saw it. She wrote a poem in which she spoke of a place where “skytowers had begun to grow / And front stoop houses started to go / And life became quite different / And it was as tho’ someone had planted seeds / And people sprouted like common weeds / And seemed unaware of accepted things.” She continued on, concluding ultimately that “what I should like is to paint this thing.”

She did so, producing works such as *New York/Liberty* (1918–19), in which downtown Manhattan’s busy port is shown with a chunky Statue of Liberty welcoming a ship. It’s a bombastic vision of all that New York has to offer, and it’s one of the works that make this list, which collects 100 of the best pieces about the city.

The works ranked below take many forms—painting, sculpture, photography, film, performance, even artist-run organizations whose activities barely resemble art. They pay homage to aspects of New York life across all five of its boroughs. Secret histories are made visible, the stuff of everyday life is repurposed as art, and tragic events from New York lore are memorialized. Binding all of these works is one larger question: What really makes a city?

These 100 works come up with many different answers to that query, not the least because a significant number of them are made by people who were born outside New York City.



John Knight, *Identity Capital*, 1998.

Photo : Courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali

This unassuming conceptual artwork at first appears to be an arrangement of 20 bouquets. Text accompanying each one makes clear that these aren't just any flowers: They came from SoHo restaurants that held significant clout at the time—Balthazar and Odeon, to name two. Meanwhile, at these eateries, a note was left stating that the bouquets had been removed and transported to American Fine Arts, the famed New York gallery where the piece debuted. This method of presentation vaguely recalls how institutions inform the public of art typically on view that has been sent out on loan, drawing a line between the value of works and the social capital associated with these cafes. That all of the restaurants were located in what was at the time the city's hottest gallery district is no coincidence either. *Identity Capital* asks a provocative question: What really counts most in the New York art world, a name or an object associated with it?