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# 9 Biggest Art World Scandals of 2015

BY MOSTAFA HEDDAYA | DECEMBER 21, 2015



Problematic pavilions at Venice Biennale, Cooper Union's tuition, and more.  
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From Kiev to California, conflicts, controversies, and lawsuits — some settled, some ongoing — plagued the sphere of art this year. Here's a look at 2015's notable conflagrations.

## 1. Cooper Union and the Fate of Free Tuition

This year saw the (partial) denouement of the conflict ignited by Cooper Union's [2013 decision](#) (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/24/nyregion/cooper-union-to-charge-undergraduates-tuition.html>) to begin charging tuition, ending over a century and a half of free education at the art, architecture, and engineering school. Embattled Cooper Union President Jamshed Bharucha [followed several trustees out the door](#) (<http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1176482/after-trustee-departures-cooper-union-president-jamshed>) this year, in the wake of an investigation by the New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman and a lawsuit filed by concerned students and alumni. The lawsuit was then settled, with the formation of an independent committee

[tasked](http://blogs.artinfo.com/artintheair/2015/09/03/checklist-cooper-union-settlement-reached-and-more/) (<http://blogs.artinfo.com/artintheair/2015/09/03/checklist-cooper-union-settlement-reached-and-more/>) with presenting a plan for a return to free tuition to the school's board by January 2018. Capping it all off, prominent Cooper Union student activists Casey Gollan and Victoria Sobel also [earned](#) (<http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1293832/french-minister-cautions-against-far-right-threat-to>) a Vera List Center fellowship to further explore the issues raised by the episode.

## 2. USC MFA Class Drops Out

Yet another art school intrigue dominated headlines this year, when an entire MFA class at the University of Southern California's Roski School of Art and Design [dropped](#) (<http://blogs.artinfo.com/artintheair/2015/05/15/uscs-entire-first-year-mfa-class-drops-out-over-bait-and-switch/>) out over an allegedly egregious administrative "bait-and-switch" on

tuition funding, as well as curricular concerns. (A faculty exodus in 2014 precipitated the latter issue.) BFA students at Roski have since staged solidarity protests, while the administration [scrambled](http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/miranda/la-et-cam-usc-art-school-dean-erica-muhl-exclusive-20150624-column.html) (<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/miranda/la-et-cam-usc-art-school-dean-erica-muhl-exclusive-20150624-column.html>) to hire faculty and admit new students to the gutted program.

### 3. (/artists/227150-tania-bruguera) **Tania Bruguera** (/artists/227150-tania-bruguera) and the Havana Biennial

The arrest and detention faced by the artist (/artists/227150-tania-bruguera) **Tania Bruguera** (/artists/227150-tania-bruguera) for her politically-charged work marred the Havana Biennial and [raised serious questions](http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/on-the-detention-of-cuban-artist-tania-bruguera-by-coco-fusco/) (<http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/on-the-detention-of-cuban-artist-tania-bruguera-by-coco-fusco/>) about the Cuban government's commitments to artistic freedom. At the same time, the Havana Biennial, and an accompanying Cuban art market frenzy, offered a glimpse of what a post-US sanctions Cuban art scene would look like, and underscored positive and negative aspects of the state of artistic production in the country. (See [our article on the Havana Biennial](http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1180089/the-12th-havana-biennials-neoliberal-arrival) (<http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1180089/the-12th-havana-biennials-neoliberal-arrival>), which includes an interview with Bruguera.)

### 4. (/artists/danh-vo-1106494) **Danh Vo** (/artists/danh-vo-1106494) and Bert Kreuk

Among the more theatrical legal controversies in the (recent) history of contemporary art, the breach-of-contract suit brought by Dutch collector Bert Kreuk against artist (/artists/danh-vo-1106494) **Danh Vo** (/artists/danh-vo-1106494) in 2013 exploded this year, and gave many art publications the excuse to [publish](http://blogs.artinfo.com/artintheair/2015/07/16/kreuk-fires-back-at-bortolozzi-over-danh-vo-ruling/) (<http://blogs.artinfo.com/artintheair/2015/07/16/kreuk-fires-back-at-bortolozzi-over-danh-vo-ruling/>) the phrase "SHOVE IT UP YOUR ASS, YOU FAGGOT." The line is from "The Exorcist," and was to be prominently featured in the work Vo offered to Kreuk as part of a court ruling mandating that he deliver a "[large and impressive](http://theartnewspaper.com/market/art-market-news/danh-vo-to-appeal-court-order-to-make-large-and-impressive-new-work-for-collector/)" (<http://theartnewspaper.com/market/art-market-news/danh-vo-to-appeal-court-order-to-make-large-and-impressive-new-work-for-collector/>) piece for the collector. An acrimonious back-and-forth played out in public between both parties before they [reached a settlement](http://www.artnews.com/2015/12/01/after-a-two-year-battle-kreuk-vo-and-bortolozzi-settle-dispute-over-alleged-commission/) (<http://www.artnews.com/2015/12/01/after-a-two-year-battle-kreuk-vo-and-bortolozzi-settle-dispute-over-alleged-commission/>) earlier this month.

### 5. Private Museums and Tax Evasion

A New York Times [article](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/11/business/art-collectors-gain-tax-benefits-from-private-museums.html?_r=0) ([http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/11/business/art-collectors-gain-tax-benefits-from-private-museums.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/11/business/art-collectors-gain-tax-benefits-from-private-museums.html?_r=0)) on the tax advantages collectors accrue from warehousing their hoards in "museums" on or proximate to their homes invited [scrutiny](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/11/business/art-collectors-gain-tax-benefits-from-private-museums.html?_r=0) ([http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/11/business/art-collectors-gain-tax-benefits-from-private-museums.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/11/business/art-collectors-gain-tax-benefits-from-private-museums.html?_r=0)) of some such institutions from the Senate's finance committee. Whether or not this closer look at private museums and the tax code will amount to anything remains to be seen, but — along with a New York state crackdown on sales-and-use taxes owed on art sales — may yet instill a fear of the taxman in some of the country's most profligate collectors. (See [our interview](http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1265553/offshore-onshore-fritz-dietl-on-his-new-delaware-freeport) (<http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1265553/offshore-onshore-fritz-dietl-on-his-new-delaware-freeport>) with Fritz Dietl on his Delaware "freeport.")

### 6. Yves Bouvier and Dmitry Rybolovlev

A bitter lawsuit sprung from a freeport's biometric gates reverberated in the art market, with such blue-chip eminences as Larry Gagosian weighing in on a perceived "conflict of interest" that arose from alleged double-dealing by freeport impresario Yves Bouvier. The multi-jurisdiction onslaught brought against Bouvier by the oligarch Dmitry Rybolovlev was [widely covered](http://www.townandcountrymag.com/society/money-and-power/a4327/billionaire-defrauded-art-world-scheme/) (<http://www.townandcountrymag.com/society/money-and-power/a4327/billionaire-defrauded-art-world-scheme/>) this year, and offered a window into the ordinarily secretive world of private art dealing. One improbable beneficiary: Picasso's stepdaughter, Catherine Hutin-Blay, to whom Rybolovlev [gifted a \\$30 million painting](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/24/arts/design/the-billionaire-the-picassos-and-a-30-million-gift-to-shame-a-middleman.html) (<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/24/arts/design/the-billionaire-the-picassos-and-a-30-million-gift-to-shame-a-middleman.html>).

### 7. Management Shakeups at Italy's Top Museums

As part of sweeping culture ministry reforms, 20 major Italian museums, including world-renowned institutions like the Uffizi in Florence and the Borghese in Rome, [announced a search](#) (http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1072620/20-major-museum-directorships-open-as-americanization-sweeps) for new directors early this year. The move ushered in “a kind of a revolution in the way these museums are going to be administered,” a museum studies scholar told ARTINFO at the time. In August, when the new appointments were announced, it was [revealed](#) (http://theartnewspaper.com/news/museums/italy-appoints-20-new-museum-directors/) that foreigners would be leading some of Italy’s most storied institutions for the first time in history.

**8. Problematic Pavilions at the Venice Biennale: Iraq, Iceland, Kenya**

What does it mean when eminent scholars and artists denounce their country’s Venice pavilion for its “neocolonial” vision? Or when Venetian authorities shutter a pavilion over security threats? Or a national pavilion is revealed to be a pay-to-play scheme disavowed at the highest levels of the government it purports to represent? The [Iraqi](#) (http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1126765/an-outsourced-vision-the-trouble-with-iraqs-neocolonial), [Icelandic](#) (http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1164744/icelandic-pavilion-mosque-shut-down-in-venice-first-gurlitt), and [Kenyan](#) (http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/15/venice-biennale-china-kenya-outrage) pavilions, respectively, offered some answers to these questions.

**9. Conflict Prompts Kiev Biennale Cancellation**

Despite the violence that plagued Ukraine this year and last, the Second Kiev Biennale still took place, albeit in an unofficial guise. But first it had to be [delayed and then canceled by its government-affiliated sponsors](#) (http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1122675/what-happened-with-the-kiev-biennale). Citing a *force majeure* clause — a legal term freeing parties from agreed-upon duties in the event of extenuating external circumstances — the biennial was officially cancelled due to political instability in the country. The revised and unofficial biennial, with funding secured from private donors and foundations by curators Georg Schölhammer and Hedwig Saxenhuber, was [announced](#) (http://blogs.artinfo.com/artintheair/2015/07/01/following-cancellation-revised-kiev-biennial-announced/) several months later.



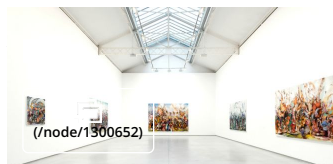
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