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**ARTS/LIT** « V.20 No.52 | December 29 - January 4, 2012 »

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# Best in Show

Our favorite arty endeavors of 2011

Outrageous improv, a futuristic nautical vessel, black humor, an alligator-infested ode to dying swampland. In 2011, we at the *Alibi* covered some astonishing works ranging from theatrical spectacles to ambitious visual arts projects to impressive contributions to the literary canon. Our current Arts and Lit editor reached out to the previous two, as well as our resident theater critic. They put their nerdy, critical noggins together, and the result is this brainstorm of the more outstanding creative output we covered over the last 365.

## Stage

### The Show, The Box Performance Space

The creation of an improv theater troupe with a regular, ongoing schedule was a notch on our city's cultural belt. The Show is the baby of The Box Performance Space and has played there weekly since its September genesis. Using audience suggestions and any absurd ideas that cross their minds, the actors create scenarios and songs that are hilarious and preposterous. Doug Montoya, co-artistic director of The Box, says audiences have been swelling since the project's inception. The crowds are full of theater veterans as well as people who don't usually frequent the scene and just want a good guffaw. I was impressed by the first performance—tight cast, relaxed energy and quick-witted banter. It's only improved since. (Summer Olsson)



FRANK FROST PHOTOGRAPHY

### Cloud Cover, Tricklock Theatre Company



COURTESY OF TRICKLOCK THEATRE COMPANY  
Elsa Menéndez' tangerines

This one-woman performance by Elsa Menéndez can be summed up in a word: joyful. Put on in a small, curtained space with AstroTurf laid on the floor and tacked to the ceiling, with funny hats bearing inspirational sayings, with a red umbrella ready to unfurl a mosaic of tiny gifts, with fresh coffee and peeled tangerines and a beautiful woman standing in the middle of it all and smiling at you, this show felt more like an intimate conversation than a play. As Menéndez told stories from her life, she offered audience members cookies and other confections. Somehow she conveyed her message—one of warmth, optimism and love—without becoming saccharine. It's a show I hope we get to see again in the coming year. (Christie Chisholm)

### Virtual Reality, Mother Road Theatre Company

Really, it's not surprising. You've got Bill Sterchi and Chad Christensen-Brummett, two of the best actors in Albuquerque, duking it out through a play penned by Academy Award-winner Alan Arkin. Add the fact that it was produced by Mother Road Theatre Company, a strong contender for the best company in the city, and of course you're going to have a great show. On a lonely stage without props, viewers' imaginations were tickled, teased and stretched as Sterchi and Christensen-Brummett invented their way through this mysterious story, which



DAVID SINKUS

Chad Christensen-Brummett gave Bill Sterchi an earful in *Virtual Reality*.

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ROB DEWALT

My No. 1 coolest experience from the arts world in 2011 was *The Due Return*. Created by Santa Fe-based collective Meow Wolf, the 75-foot-long intergalactic ship occupied the Muñoz Waxman Gallery in the Center for Contemporary Arts. A collaboration between more than 100 artists, the ship comprised two levels, personnel bunks, archives, a lab—even a working hydroponic garden.

Every aspect was hands-on, and manipulating a joystick in the control room, or climbing through a hatch into a hidden crawl space, brought out the 5-year-old explorer in me. From the macabre objets d'art in the captain's quarters to the reflections in a crew member's diary, the details were scrupulous. I had high expectations before visiting the project, but the wondrous *Due Return* far surpassed my imaginings. (SO)

**Collected Memories, Richard Maitland**

Maitland's collection of 10 years' worth of folksy, surrealist paintings, collages and sculptures was the most haunting and emotionally powerful exhibition I saw this year. Visiting with the octogenarian artist in his magnificent Rio Rancho home also gave me a rounded picture of one of the most colorful and historically important characters to grace our arts scene. Maitland is a true local treasure, and the Duke City would be remiss not to stage another show of his fantastic works. (SA)



ERIC WILLIAMS ERICWPHOTO.COM

**Weekly Alibi's Operation Art Boxes**

In August, a swarm of refurbished *Alibi* distribution boxes appeared along the Central corridor. Each was a little original masterpiece. Choosing this project may seem a little like nepotism because the *Alibi* sponsored it. But what I'm actually including in my best-of count is the willingness of our city's residents to help beautify it, the kick-ass boxes themselves and the people who designed them. (SO)

**Emergence, Adabel Allen**

In October, I was swooped away by Adabel Allen's world of lovely and lovelorn birds. Her show at New Grounds Gallery showcased her talent as a vastly skilled gravure printer as well as a poet—both in the visual and written sense. The mixture of whimsy and naked sentimentality in her work is honest, beautiful and heartwarmingly cathartic. Certainly an artist on the rise. (SA)



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