

HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

The Top 10 Art Documentaries to Watch on Netflix Instant

by [Megan Youngblood](#) on June 14, 2013

I like to think of the mythical Netflix Marathon as the process of accumulating inspiration, but it could be more realistically dubbed procrastination. Either way, it has become a talent I've honed to perfection, one that I desperately need to figure out a way to work into my résumé.

One of my personal favorite genres on which to cinematographically gorge myself is the art documentary. Here's a list of 10 documentaries on art and visual culture available to stream on Netflix (in no particular order) that will fill you with creative inspiration — or, perhaps more accurately, help you delay the project with an impending deadline just a little bit longer.

1. [Style Wars \(1983\)](#) >>



Style Wars (image [via](#))

Style Wars has become an iconic film with an almost cult following in young creative communities. Its ubiquity aside, *Style Wars* is a great documentary on the graffiti movement in New York City and has been followed up with numerous others covering graffiti in other parts of the world such

as *Piece by Piece*, *Graffiti Verite*, *Next*, and *Bomb It*.

2. [**Exit Through the Gift Shop \(2010\) >>**](#)



Exit Through the Gift Shop (image [via](#))

This documentary tells the story of street art from our current decade, with the focus on Shepard Fairey and Banksy. The playfully rebellious nature of these graffiti artists is bound to inspire your inner angst-filled teenager to want to write on your bedroom walls something lamenting “The System.” The film also has a vaguely self-deprecating tone, which keeps it from being pretentious.

3. [**Beautiful Losers \(2008\) >>**](#)



Beautiful Losers (image [via](#))

Beautiful Losers opens with photographer Ed Templeton playing an accordion in front of (presumably) his suburban home. I'll let you judge where that would lie on the continuum of hipsterdom. Regardless, this documentary features some of today's great artists, who talk about everything from childhood dreams of being a garbage man to finding a friend's head in Dragon Park. The artists in this documentary, including Barry McGee, Harmony Korine, Mike Mills and Aaron Rose, represent the aesthetic that our generation will likely be posthumously recognized for: a DIY combination of punk, graffiti, and skateboard culture.

4. [Bill Cunningham's New York \(2010\)](#) >>



Bill Cunningham's New York (image [via](#))

Before there were dozens of blogs with street photos by self-appointed fashion experts, there was Bill Cunningham, a staple in the New York fashion scene known for snapping photos of the fashion-conscious throughout New York City. Although typically his lens's focus is on the beautiful fashionistas he documents for the *New York Times* Style Section, this documentary focuses on the photographer, highlighting his warm persona, small apartment, and meticulous attention to detail.

5. [Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child \(2010\) >>](#)



Jean-Michel Basquiat: Radiant Child (image [via](#))

Another documentary that transports viewers back to 1970s and '80s New York, this documentary exposes Jean-Michel Basquiat's experience in lower Manhattan. Basquiat's work is now regarded as some of the most influential and important work of his era. His rapid escalation into fame left him disoriented, depressed, and addicted to drugs, and although he died prematurely, his work remains.

If this time period in New York is of particular interest to you, try to follow it up with *Limelight*, a documentary about club owner Peter Gatien and how Rudy Giuliani took the fun out of everything.

6. [Our City Dreams \(2008\) >>](#)



Chiara Clementa, director of *Our City Dreams*, on location (image [via](#))

This film follows the creative paths of three female artists living in New York City. Each of the artists presents a unique work process and style and discusses her indestructible ties to the city. There is something TED talk-ish about this film, with a very intimate, feminist, pro-New York message. Watch this one if you are looking to get some inspiration to paint — I practically ran to my sketchpad when it ended.

[7. *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry* \(2012\) >>](#)



Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry (image [via](#))

The extremely talented and controversial Ai Weiwei was thrown into the international consciousness when he spoke out against the Beijing Olympics after designing its centerpiece. The conversations with the artists and studio assistant in the film create a portrait of the Chinese artist that's more intimate than his usual depictions in Western media. And like Ai Weiwei himself, the interviewees are witty, opinionated, and often dissidents in their own right.

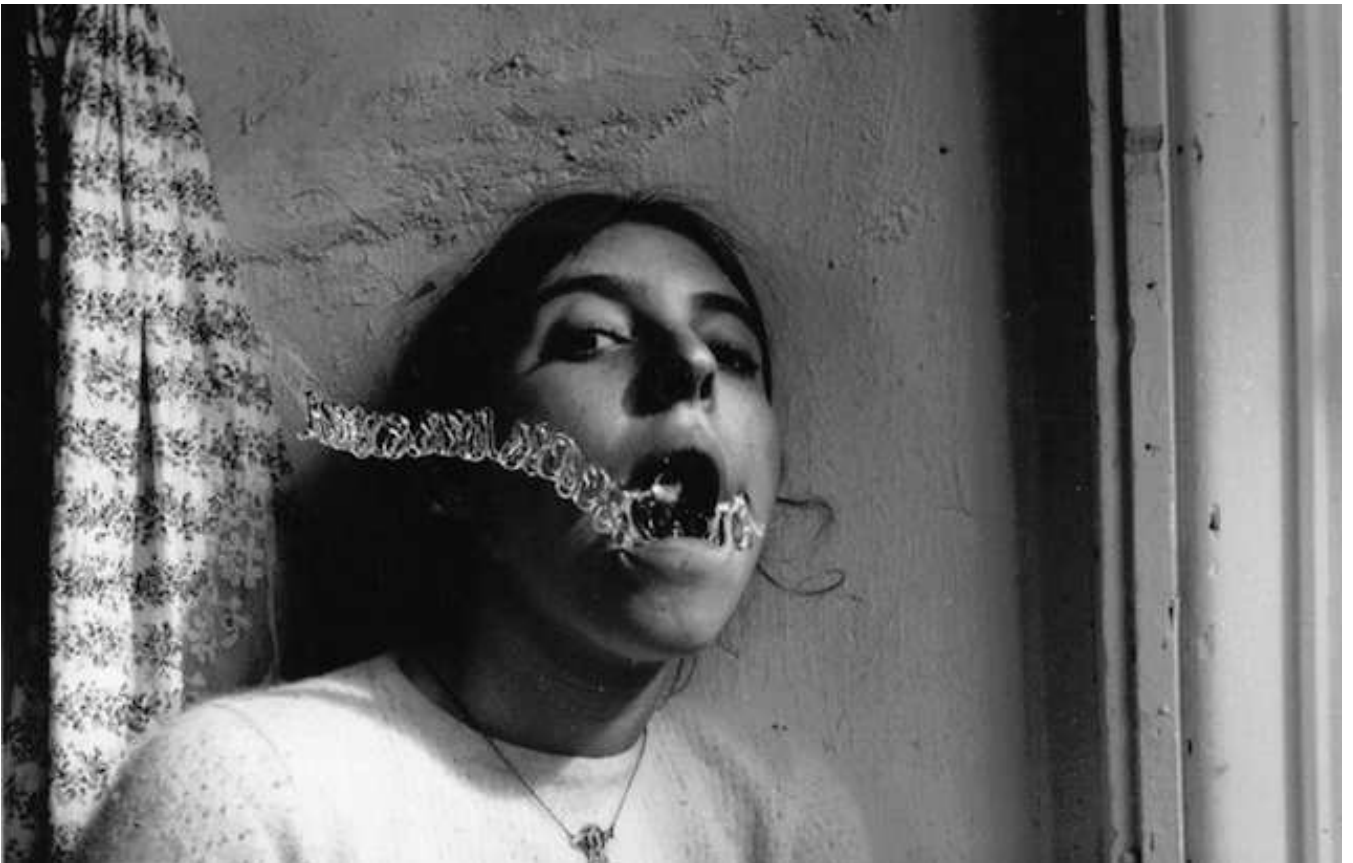
8. [Indie Game: The Movie \(2011\) >>](#)



Indie Game: The Movie (image [via](#))

Game designers are artists, and anyone who doesn't believe that should see this film. This movie documents the creation of Meat Boy and Fez, two highly anticipated independent games that are slowly driving their creators insane. The film reveals the creation process, highlighting how stressful this combination of right-brained coding and left-brained design work is.

9. [*The Woodmans* \(2010\)](#) >>



The Woodmans (image [via](#))

The haunting photos of Francesca Woodman made a New York appearance in an exhibit at the Guggenheim last year. Woodman's untimely suicide only enhances the mysterious and dark beauty of her images. Her family members, who are all accomplished artists as well, talk about her naturally provocative temperament and the way this translated into her work.

10. [Waste Land \(2010\) >>](#)



Waste Land (image [via](#))

In this documentary, Brazilian artist Vik Muniz travels to one of the world's largest landfills in Rio de Janeiro and reappropriates trash to create intricate portraits of the Brazilian trash pickers, who live off of the recyclables they find. He incorporates them into the creative process, making the film as much about them and their introduction to art as it is about Muniz himself.

Tagged as: [Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry](#), [Beautiful Losers](#), [Bill Cunningham's New York](#), [Exit Through the Gift Shop](#), [Indie Game: The Movie](#), [Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child](#), [Netflix](#), [Our City Dreams](#), [Style Wars](#), [The Woodmans](#), [Waste Land](#)

- **Subscribe to the Hyperallergic newsletter!**

You may also like:

- [Explore Film Favorites on SnagFilms](#)
- [Amazing Cache of Vintage Films: East Village 1980s, NYC Subway 1960s/40s, David Hockney 1960s](#)
- [Southampton Adventures with Hyperallergic](#)
- [The Rise and Fall of Polaroid](#)
- [An Art Capital Shines: Berlin Art Week, Sept 17–22, 2013](#)