

FRIEZE

October 27, 2025

The 25 Best Works of the 21st Century

This year, frieze asked 200 artists, curators, critics and museum directors to name the most outstanding works of art from the past quarter century. From their nominations, we compiled a list of 25 works that have shaped contemporary art since the year 2000.

1. Cameron Rowland, *Attica Series Desk*, 2016



Cameron Rowland, *Attica Series Desk*, 2016, steel, powder coating, laminated particleboard, distributed by Corcraft, 152 × 182 × 73 cm. Rental at cost.

The Attica Series Desk is manufactured by prisoners in Attica Correctional Facility. Prisoners seized control of the D-Yard in Attica from September 9th to 13th 1971. Following the inmates' immediate demands for amnesty, the first in their list of practical proposals was to extend the enforcement of "the New York State minimum wage law to prison industries." Inmates working in New York State prisons are currently paid \$0.10 to \$1.14 an hour. Inmates in Attica produce furniture for government offices throughout the state. This component of government administration depends on inmate labor.

Rental at cost: Artworks indicated as "Rental at cost" are not sold. Each of these artworks may be rented for 5 years for the total cost of the Corcraft products that constitute it.

I first saw Cameron Rowland's *Attica Series Desk* (2016) at Artists Space in New York. Rowland had only been showing for a few years, but I remember feeling a sense of urgency, knowing this was an important moment for both the artist and the art world. The work itself, of course, appeared to be an unremarkable office desk; only later did I learn it had been manufactured by incarcerated labourers at Attica Correctional Facility and purchased through the New York state correctional industries catalogue – a readymade charged with the disquieting truth of the prison industrial complex. That knowledge transformed its bureaucratic banality into something discreetly monumental and deeply unsettling. Like much of Rowland's practice, the work confronts the material traces of systemic inequity and property relations, making visible what is often hidden. Nearly a decade later, the weight of that first encounter still lingers. — *Terence Trouillot*