The season’s upcoming art exhibitions offer a welcome departure from 2012’s round of repeats, bringing new artists and new perspectives, even on a topic as well-worn as French impressionism.

In October, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art will take a fresh look at the movement with “Impressionist France: Visions of Nation From Le Gray to Monet.”

The show’s innovation is the inclusion of photography and a focus on landscape’s role in what exhibit co-curator Simon Kelly describes as a “broader campaign to construct a new sense of nation” at a time when the country was adapting to modernity.

Featured works include loans from major museums such as the Metropolitan Museum in New York, which lent its “Regatta at Sainte-Adresse,” by Claude Monet (1867), and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, which contributed “The Rue Mosnier With Flags,” by Edouard Manet.

For a more contemporary artistic take on light and color, head to the Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas. Beginning in mid-September, the museum will display seminal light artist James Turrell’s 1968 projection of blue light, “Gard Blue.” Timed to coincide with a series of big Turrell exhibits around the country, including the Guggenheim Museum's members-only showing of a new Turrell light piece created for the museum's rotunda, the Spencer projection will be presented in a specially built, box-like room in the Central Court. (Sept. 15-May 18)

Since it opened in 1999, the Kansas City Art Institute’s Block Artspace has specialized in exhibits of video art from around the world, and it has a knockout video show for its fall opener.

If you’ve never seen Laurie Simmons’ dancing birthday cake or Christian Jankowski’s footage of rooftop hula-hoopers in New York, here’s your chance. These videos and others are being screened as part of the traveling exhibit “Performance Now,” a star-studded lineup of works, many commissioned by Performa, a biennial of visual art performance launched in 2005 by curator RoseLee Goldberg.

The exhibit, co-organized by Independent Curators International, New York, and Performa, gives KC audiences a chance to see works by Guy Ben-Ner, Marina Abramovic, Kalup Linzy and Ryan Trecartin.

In “Seven Easy Pieces,” Abramovic re-enacts important historical performance works including Vito Acconci’s “Seedbed” and Joseph Beuys’ “How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare.”

Ben-Ner installed himself and his family in Ikea showrooms around the world, staying until they were kicked out.

Other works take cues from soap operas, politics and everyday life; one features Claymation. And if you missed Israeli artist Yael Bartana’s powerful “Mary Koszmary (Nightmares)” when it was shown at Grand Arts in 2009-10, put it on the top of your list.

In addition to roughly two dozen videos, the exhibit will feature related photographs and objects, including 20 hula hoops. A four-night film series (dates to be announced) will include showings of Simmons’ “Music of Regret,” Liz Magic Laser’s “I Feel Your Pain” and other works. (Through Oct. 12; watch for a review in this section on Sept. 1.)

It has been two years since the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art presented the traveling “Pattern ID” group show of eye-catching figurative works. This fall, the museum revisits contemporary figuration from varied cultural
perspectives with “Dressed Up,” a four-person exhibit curated by the museum’s executive director, Barbara O’Brien.

The exhibit takes its title from Nigerian-born Marcia Kure’s “Dressed Up” series fusing hip-hop and 19th-century Victorian images into disconcerting portraits.

In 2011, Kure exhibited the series at Susan Inglett Gallery in New York, which noted, “The series suggests that the sense of decorum and gravitas conveyed by haute couture/Victorian fashion belies the colonial violence and decadence of that age; conversely, the near criminalization of hip-hop fashion fails to contend with the humanity of many of its avatars or their status as respectable global citizens.”

Joining works by Kure, Neeta Madahar’s staged photographic portraits, Trenton Doyle Hancock’s narrative of invented characters and Hope Gangloff’s portraits of people she knows should make for an intense array. (Oct. 11-April 13)

The Grand Arts’ website has been carrying Ellie Ga’s dispatches from Alexandria, Egypt, since February 2012, when the New York artist began a project about Alexandria’s now-submerged Pharos lighthouse. Built between 280 and 247 B.C., the lighthouse was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Earthquakes eventually reduced the structure to ruins, and in the 15th century, Citadel of Qaitbay was erected on the site.

The underwater remnants of the lighthouse have become an object of fascination for archaeologists and divers, including Ga, whose dispatches document her diving adventures and observations during her months of study of the lighthouse at Alexandria University’s marine archaeology department.

During her time in the city, Ga took photographs, collected objects and documented her experiences on video. Her upcoming show at Grand Arts, “Square, Octagon, Circle,” titled for the component shapes of the lighthouse, will display these materials and also encompass a 2007 trip to the Arctic on a polar schooner. Last November, Ga presented a performance inspired by that trip at Grand Arts. (Sept. 6-Oct. 26)

The Belger Arts Center, in collaboration with Red Star Studios and the Consulate of Mexico in Kansas City, presents a traveling group show this fall of contemporary Mexican artists working in the Uriarte Talavera tradition.

Uriarte Talavera is the name of a workshop, founded in 1824, that specializes in talavera pottery, a type of majolica dating to the 16th century. The works are typically adorned with intricate floral and abstract patterns influenced by pre-Columbian, Islamic, Spanish and Italian Renaissance designs, but as this show of more than 30 ceramic murals, platters and sculptures attests, artists continue to innovate and experiment at the workshop.

Uriarte and the University of Americas Puebla organized the exhibit, inviting artists to create works to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the 1862 Battle of Puebla, a battle Mexican forces won against the French army. Representing a milestone in Mexico’s resistance to colonialism, it is celebrated today as Cinco de Mayo. (Oct. 4-Nov. 30)

The Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art has lined up an exhibit of “rebellious” ceramics for fall. Peruvian-born Kukuli Velarde takes no prisoners in “Plunder Me, Baby,” an exhibit of figurative works inspired by pre-Columban art but carrying a message for today.

“They show in their attitudes and gestures the rebellious spirit that should never abandon our hearts,” Velarde writes in her artist statement. “Not anymore passive pawns of their own history … they are us.”

She has titled each piece with pejorative names — “the same ones I have endured because of my indigenous ancestry,” she says. “They all have my face — for I had to become each of them to reclaim ownership and to take the name calling with defiance.” (Sept. 27-Dec. 22)

In the Nerman’s Oppenheimer New Media Gallery, Kansas City artist Dylan Mortimer will continue his provocative reinvention of religious art with “Illuminate,” a site-specific installation featuring three wall-mounted halos. The halos will be fitted with motion sensors and light up when viewers approach. (Oct. 25-Feb. 9)

A sign of a post-recession energy is the opening of a couple of big shows prior to Labor Day.

The “Performance Now” show at Block Artspace is already two weeks into its run. On Saturday, the Nelson opens “Echoes: Islamic Art and Contemporary Artists” in the Bloch Building Project Space. The exhibit includes a 17th-century Persian mosaic arch, on view for the first time in more than 30 years.

The exhibit pairs traditional works from the museum’s collection with works by international contemporary artists influenced by Islam, including Shirin Neshat and Shahzia Sikander. And it extends outdoors, where a Pakistani cargo truck created by Kansas City artist Asheer Akram will be parked near the Bloch Building entrance. (Aug. 31-March 30)
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