



kendall jenner

gigi hadid

lauren devine

by lizzie fitch
and ryan trecartin

10th anniversary art issue

placebo pets

Plugged-in to the future, the artists
Lizzie Fitch and Ryan Trecartin
take Kendall Jenner and Gigi Hadid
to a whole other dimension.

By Diane Solway
Photographs by Jason Kibbler
Styled by Patrick Mackie

DOORRAIFIT



Opposite, clockwise, from left: Kendall Jenner wears Eres bikini; Hood by Air lace-lock button up and puffer scarf; Philipp Plein pants; Alexander Wang bag; Louis Vuitton boots; prosthetic nose from Naimie's Beauty Center (throughout). Gigi Hadid wears Hood by Air Atelier harness; Onia swimsuit top; Hood by Air monster trousers; Louis Vuitton boots; prosthetic nose from Naimie's Beauty Center (throughout); makeup artist's own prosthetic ears (throughout). Jesse Hoffman wears T-shirt from Ohio; his own Janiva Ellis dress; his own glasses.

One Sunday afternoon this past August, Kendall Jenner and her BFF, Gigi Hadid, went "rafting" on a green carpet in Culver City, California. Dressed in Philipp Plein leather track pants and a red patent puffer scarf by Hood by Air, Jenner lay sprawled in the back of a dinghy, while Hadid, also dressed in HBA's post-gender streetwear, sat in front, scouting ahead through binoculars. Gusts from a wind machine threatened to blow them overboard, but they persevered, trusting their creature-guide, who wore a baggy T-shirt, a faux-denim shift, and disco platforms sheathed in nylon stockings. Occasionally, he dispensed with the oar he was holding to film his passengers. Hadid and Jenner, no strangers to on-camera transformations, were going further than usual. With pointy ears protruding from her wind-lashed hair, Hadid was a lion-fox; Jenner, wearing a prosthetic nose that altered her famous attributes, was a bunny-cat. They were Snapchat animal filters come to life.

Had you stumbled upon the scene, you might have assumed that a fashion shoot was in progress, what with all the cameras pointed at the models. But, in fact, they were being pulled into a virtual-reality world engineered by the artists Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch, whose "sci-fi theater of the absurd," as *Art in America* once dubbed their work, has made them among the most lauded, exciting, and prescient artists of their generation. "They are probably the only ones directly wired to the future," says Massimiliano Gioni, artistic director at New York's New Museum, who, as director of the 2013 Venice Biennale, first presented their acclaimed suite of films, *Priority Innfield*. "Their vision of tomorrow is equally terrifying and liberating, Edenic and apocalyptic."

Both Trecartin and Fitch came of age in the Internet era, just before the digital revolution embedded smartphones into our palms, and their work has been consumed with explorations into how cameras, social media, and reality TV have changed the way we engage with the world and one another. Sensorial overload doesn't even begin to describe the effect of watching their maniacally mutable movies, any more than it does our own saturated age. Comprised of installations, props, soundscapes, and sculptural theaters that they build themselves, their films are rife with multilinear narratives, simultaneous perspectives, and merry young pranksters of morphing gender, race, and identity. "Caught in the ecstasy of communication, their creatures inhabit a world in which personalities and bodies are perennially interchangeable, like psycho time-shares," Gioni observes. Scenes jump around, and chatter is fragmentary—a collage of accents, idioms, and cyberspace vernacular. Done up in a lurid palette, characters speak endlessly about themselves, saying things like "Don't ignore ignore me me me."

In Trecartin and Fitch's *W* commission, which they titled "Placebo Pets," Jenner and Hadid are super-friendly, highly adaptive domesticated animals in a humanoid zoo. The idea grew out of the artists wondering, as only they could, "Who would survive if a superior alien humanoid species came to Earth?" Their answer: "the friendliest." Trecartin has long been interested in pet culture and the dynamic between people and companion animals—seeing in it a parallel with our relationship to technology, in the way that we've been trained to adapt our behavior, language, and how we present our myriad selves at any given moment. "There's a certain power that animals have over us when they respond to us in unexpected, friendly ways," he said. "And it's really them domesticating us almost more than us domesticating them, because they're

training us to want them. Training and taming something is not one-sided. It's a dynamic. We created social media, but then it changed us because we interacted with it. Because it has its own rules and limitations. And it's not us, even though it is us. And then it transforms us and transforms the next thing that happens just by existing. You can't really avoid being trained."

Eternally upbeat, Trecartin is 35 but looks boyish, a result perhaps of his steady diet of vitamins (he travels with a suitcase dedicated to them) or his regimen of cryotherapy, a treatment increasingly popular with elite athletes that involves entering a tank of nitrogen-iced air chilled to a numbing 220 degrees below zero. "It triggers your genes to express themselves in their survival mode," he said. "The coolest part is the endorphins that get released in your brain to help you stay calm. When you get out, you're giggling." Fitch, 34, is the more introverted of the pair, but her laid-back manner belies her whip-smart instincts. The two bonded quickly as freshmen at the Rhode Island School of Design in 2000; ever since, they've shared their creative and domestic lives, though not as a couple. The value of friendship and Platonic love is a theme that runs through their work.

Who better, then, to embody their highly adaptive, hyperfriendly humanoid pets than social media queens Hadid and Jenner? The millennial offspring of reality-TV momagers literally grew up on screens—Jenner beginning at 11 in the Kardashian family saga; Hadid as a toddler in Baby Guess ads. Their celebrity BFF-dom has generated its own moniker—KenGi—which has spawned a line of gold-plated KENGI necklaces and serious cultural currency. "KenGi is basically the best-best friendship of our generations. Plural," a cheeky post on BuzzFeed quipped. "That means out of all current generations alive right now." It's a friendship venerated on Instagram (Jenner's followers number almost 66 million; Hadid's 23 million), though, really, on every digital platform you'll find images of them "twinning," sauntering in matching gear, their private lives increasingly mediated to fit the public construct they've created. "It's both a friendship and a public commodity to be consumed," Fitch noted. The artists wanted the feeling between the model duo to come across as "obnoxiously friendly and caring," Trecartin had advised before the shoot. "Not campy, Old Navy-friendly, or stilted fashion-world friendly—but accessible, in a way that feels unusual."

On the morning of the shoot, Hadid and Jenner sat in makeup chairs, scrolling through their iPhones and talking while their hair, nails, and faces were tended. "I'd be so down for Roscoe's for lunch," Hadid said suddenly.

"Yeah, definitely down for Roscoe's," Jenner replied without looking up.

It was an hour before filming was to begin and Trecartin moseyed in to give them the lines of dialogue he planned to shoot. He was wearing black cut-off shorts, an old T-shirt, orange ankle socks, and New Balance sneakers. His plan called for the two models to jump out of a tent and discover that they were wearing identical dresses and sandals by Louis Vuitton. As with the actors in his films, Trecartin would feed each of the models a few words and have them repeat them over and over, so he could later pick the options he liked best. Jenner laughed as she scanned their characters' alternating dialogue: "This is hilarious and sounds like us. Geej, you'll love it. Listen." She read aloud: "It's bonkers how often we finish each other's emotional

head space... Yeah, I was just about to cry. I bet you too. I know, me too, like when was the last time we didn't feel together too ha-ha..."

All was not quite as cozy on the wardrobe front. To help translate their raffish sensibility, the artists had invited along the pop singer, stylist, and extreme-sports enthusiast Lauren Devine—their "fashion whisperer," as Trecartin called her. Devine has appeared in one of their films, along with a crew of regulars that includes the fashion designer Telfar Clemens and the performance artist Jesse Hoffman. She was dressed in a white tank, basketball shorts, and high-tops. The artists had made many of their wardrobe selections in advance, after reviewing images culled by W. Trecartin had digitally scribbled red lines and typed "NAW" in neon over several; others he simply blacked out. As Devine perused the racks of clothes and accessories, she rejected many an item with "No, they won't like this," referring to Trecartin and Fitch, much to the dismay of W's stylist. Alighting on a blue beaded bag and shoes by Christopher Kane, she said, "This could be cool with the Walmart outfit we brought," at once buoying and deflating the stylist's optimism. The tension eased only after Trecartin suddenly announced, "We need a cute puppy!" a thought prompted by seeing puppy pictures on Jenner's phone. He wanted the cover image to convey "more pet-ness," he told me, though the set itself was upholstered in pet-furniture carpeting meant to evoke what Trecartin called "a cat fish tank." Before long, a beagle puppy was added to the scene, and, so too, was Devine, who was whisked into makeup-and-wardrobe and transformed into a human-dog hybrid.

Trecartin and Fitch employ multiple cameras to create overlapping points of view. While shooting the raft image, the *W* photographer was focused on keeping Jenner and Hadid centered in the fixed frame and kept pushing Hoffman to the fringes. "Jesse was supposed to be the humanoid from another planet who was the owner in the relationship," Trecartin said the next day. "But because the photo guy kept telling him, 'You're blocking Kendall,' he looks like he's a paparazzo or a tour guide. At first we thought, Wait, this is all wrong." But then they understood it as an opportunity to adapt, seeing as the competing agendas as "an obstacle" that would generate new ideas in the editing process. As is their practice, they would shape the material only when they saw all of the images and footage. Then they would use the full range of editing software to combine bits from various takes and enhance or introduce elements (a stunt chicken, say, or a body part), to create a fully charged visual assault.

Trecartin shot the footage for his 2013 film *Junior War* in 1999, when he was a high school senior in rural Ohio. Whenever he'd pull out his handheld camera, he recalled, "everyone's instinct was 'Why are you filming? No one should see what we're doing. Don't narc.'" By the time he had finished his senior thesis at Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), in 2004, performing for the camera had become second nature—for him and everyone else. Titled *A Family Finds Entertainment*, the work was a video he made with art-school friends who embodied the poseurs, avatars, and wannabes of contemporary Internet culture. The film presaged YouTube, and won him art world cult status—not to mention a berth in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, at the age of 25.

In more recent work, such as *Priority Innfield*, characters operate more like players in a networked system. For *Site Visit* (2014), a group-expedition-type horror movie that was filmed in a former Masonic temple in Los Angeles, the artists created a 360-degree shooting

PERFORMANCE ACTORS: JESSE HOFFMAN AND LAUREN DEVINE; PUPPY: @SACHIDDES; HOLLYWOOD: FITCH; TRECARTIN STUDIO; SEAN GRANTAN; SERGIO PASTOR; FITS DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL PROJECTS: ISABEL VENERO; PROJECT MANAGER: SIMONE MANWARING; FITS PRODUCTION: LOUISE LIGHTNER; HAIR ASSISTANT: SHIRAGO SHIBATA; MAKEUP ASSISTANT: WALTER WOPRISK; SOUND TECHNICIAN: HARLOW PRICE; CINEMATOGRAPHY: ALEX GVOJIC AND ROMAN MULLER; AT CANTIERE: THIS OHIO SHOPPERS; RAUL DE NEVES; LIZ AWYELSKI; LARRY ANN HEGERITY; LINDSAY BEEBE; SPECIAL THANKS TO SMASHBOX STUDIOS; CAPTURE THIS: TELFAR; HOOD BY AIR; TASI; JEREMIAH THIES; ELLEN GREENBERG; SPRUETH IMAGES; REGEN PROJECTS; LOS ANGELES; ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY; NEW YORK



environment by mounting cameras on mobile props, outfitting the actors with GoPros and other extreme-sports cameras, and by casting drones, night-vision cameras, and 3-D Handycams as actors in the scene. At one point, they synced 22 cameras, all in an effort to explore how different realities coexist in the same location. “People still want to know which is the main camera,” Trecartin said. “And when there is no main camera, all of a sudden all those languages they had developed for it collapse, and people are in a confusing new space.” Their use of drones was a result of Fitch’s obsession with survivalist and ecotourism gear. Fitch taught herself to fly one during shooting and even took a phone video of herself with a drone on a leash. “You basically tell them how you want them to behave,” she said.

This past summer, the artists spent a 14-hour day at Cedar Point amusement park, a mecca for roller coaster enthusiasts in Sandusky, Ohio, and, coincidentally, a favorite teenage haunt of theirs. Trecartin longs to one day make his own roller coaster, and he described in breathless detail the harrowing thrill of riding one with the highest g-force legally permissible—or so he thought. They were there to research a movie-ride game they plan to make as a commission. “As movies and games merge, the tension between them will have to do more with the type of agency you have,” Trecartin said. “Like, are you taken along for a ride, or do you have to participate, or is it somewhere in between? And so, we were thinking about how rides relate to movies. Because you participate, you’re physically involved, but it’s not like you choose your own adventure.”

The two are famously peripatetic, but for now they live in a ranch house in Burbank that they share with their four cats and Fitch’s partner, Sergio Pastor, a computer whiz who works with the pair. Nearby is their 9,000-square-foot studio, located in a neighborhood packed with fabrication studios for the entertainment industry. The day I visited, Fitch led me on a tour of the rambling space, which was littered with props and furniture from past films: a piano, and a broken-down Barcalounger and bench from the Masonic temple. Outside, there was a cage, a pickup truck filled with parts of a bed, and an old van they had driven for years and used as a prop in several works. The artists sit opposite each other in their “office,” Trecartin at a bank of monitors. Their division of labor is not defined: Trecartin generally writes the scripts and directs and edits the movies in which they both appear, and collaborates with Fitch on the sculptural environments, props, sets, makeup, and costumes. Still, Fitch weighs in on all parts of the process, and their back-and-forth is so essential to their work, both agree, that they liken their collaboration to a jazz ensemble, alternating solos when one of them wants to take the lead. As it happens, both play music—Fitch, keyboard and drums, and Trecartin, piano. At RISD they composed music on a computer for their band Experimental People, and their electronic scores have played an important role in their films. This month, for the first time, they will present a program of new sonic compositions and live sound as part of the Jason Moran–curated series Artists Studio, at New York’s Park Avenue Armory. They will be joined by instrumentalists and collaborators, including Ashland Mines, the Los Angeles composer and cult DJ.

For the *W* cover image, the artists had brought along friendship bracelets they’d picked up in Mexico woven with the words **FUCK TRUMP**. They envisioned Jenner and Hadid popping out of the tent drinking Tecate beer, with the bracelets on their arms. But during the shoot, “the bracelets kept getting pushed aside,” Trecartin said. “I thought there must be a reason.” “Well, there’s Kendall’s dad,” offered Fitch, referring to Caitlyn Jenner, the world’s most famous trans woman. “She was at the Republican Convention.” “Oh, yeah,” Trecartin replied. “Caitlyn’s staunchly Republican.” For a moment, we all mused on the irony of her affiliation, given the politics surrounding Caitlyn’s transformation—and that of many others—into her authentic self. “Like, so weird!” Trecartin broke in, laughing. “Well, it makes for good TV, I guess.” ♦



Under Said, 2016

Clockwise, from left: Hadid wears Telfar top and jeans. Lauren Devine wears Telfar “Customer” T-shirt; Fendi shorts; artists’ own hat. Jenner wears Telfar shirt and shorts; TASI Designs for FTS Solo cup earrings. All glasses from Target.

Hair by Recine for Rodin; makeup and special effects makeup by Sammy Mourabit for Make Up for Ever; manicures by Marisa Carmichael for Formula X at Streeters.

TRECARTIN AND FITCH HAVE LONG BEEN INTERESTED IN THE DYNAMIC BETWEEN PEOPLE AND COMPANION ANIMALS—JENNER AND HADID ARE SUPERFRIENDLY, HIGHLY ADAPTIVE DOMESTICATED PETS IN A HUMANOID ZOO.



Pitch Flare, 2016

From left: Hoffman wears T-shirt from Ohio, his own Janiva Ellis dress, his own hand-painted shoes. Jenner wears Marni jacket, DKNY Pure track pants, Rosamosario plastic bralette, American Apparel bra (underneath), MSGM bag, Darkfin gloves, FTIS skid rim pigtail trucker hat from the movie *Mark Trade*. Hadid wears Jonathan Simkhai sports bra, Bally pants, 69 hat, Eddie Borgo choker, Darkfin gloves.



Open Horse, 2016

Jenner wears Moschino bikini, Escada Sport jacket, Versace pants, Corona Collection hat, Christopher Kane bag.



Captcha Off, 2016

Hadid wears Emilio Pucci jacket and bodysuit, Prada shorts, Louis Vuitton boots. On animated figures: Evolve underwear (on head); other clothing from Ohio. In hands (right): TASI Designs antler necklace. For stores, prices, and more, go to Wmag.com/where-to-buy-november-2016.

PAPER®



WATCH RYAN TRECARTIN AND LIZZIE FITCH'S W MAG COVER STORY VIDEO STARRING KENDALL JENNER AND GIGI HADID

Carey O'Donnell

10/21/16 at 12:05PM

Kendall Jenner and Gigi Hadid are the stars of a totally inspired new [W Mag](#) 10th anniversary art issue cover story, directed by acclaimed and revered multimedia artists Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch. Fitch and Trecartin, long-time collaborators, whose often frightening work encompasses and lampoons social consciousness with technology and social media, envision Jenner and Hadid--real life BFFs--has wistful "domesticated humanoid pets."



Using their trademark voice modifiers, Trecartin and Fitch have the young supermodels rambling on about "being a package deal" and the joys of drinking water and running around the backyard; all while frenetic, beatific music blares in the background. The clip descends into howling, wind-swept madness.

The artist duo also directed the cover shoot (which stars NYC artist and one of Trecartin's muses, Lauren Devine):



They explained their inspiration comes from the idea of technology domesticating us, as much as we've domesticated our varied pets.

"There's a certain power that animals have over us when they respond to us in unexpected, friendly ways," says Trecartin. "And it's really them domesticating us almost more than us domesticating them, because they're training us to want them. Training and taming something is not one-sided. We created social media, but then it changed us because we interacted with it. It transforms us and transforms the next thing that happens just by existing. You can't really avoid being trained."

The two artists also see Kendall and Gigi, their friendship, and their respective brands, as a perfect representation of this symbiotic relationship:

Fitch and Trecartin were also intrigued by the friendship between Jenner and Hadid, and the way their identities have morphed into a combined idea of friendship, known as "KenGi." The millennial offspring of reality-TV momagers literally grew up onscreen — Jenner beginning at 11 in the Kardashian family saga, Hadid as a toddler in Baby Guess ads. "It's both a friendship and a public commodity to be consumed," says Fitch.

Watch some of the duo's other videos below:



35 Years! 35 Years! 35 Years! 35 Years! 35 Years! 35 Years! 35 Years! 35 Years! 35 Years!

BOMB

A photograph of a woman with long blonde hair running down a hallway. She is wearing a dark, form-fitting dress and white sneakers. She is holding a red plastic cup with a white lid and a straw. The hallway has blue carpeting and green walls. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter.

Number 135 / Spring 2016

Ryan Trecartin by Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer





More than a decade of ontologically oracular and hilariously hyper-cogitated collaborative moviemaking has proven Ryan Trecartin to be a major and enduring force of contemporary culture—the flux capacitor powering our collective travels through various virtual realities. Since we last talked a few years ago, Trecartin’s been firing on all cylinders: with longtime creative partner Lizzie Fitch, he presented a multi-movie, multi-room installation called *Priority Innfield* at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013. It was the beginning of a large, ongoing series of narratively linked movies, soundscapes, objects, and sculptural theaters that expanded the following year to include *SITE VISIT* at Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin and *Ledge* at Regen Projects in Los Angeles. Oh, and I almost forgot, he also contributed to and co-curated the New Museum’s 2015 Triennial, *Surround Audience*, with Lauren Cornell.

I caught up with the artist at his LA studio, a low brick building on San Fernando Road with an expansive open workspace in back and a cluster of offices in front, where he was holed up editing new movies for the as-yet-untitled mega-project’s latest installment, which will be on view at Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York this spring. Littered with countless sticks of sweet-smelling palo santo, the editing room had a bay of computers in the middle and a bed in the corner for long nights. We settled in. —*Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer*

i



ii



(i) Lizzie Fitch/Ryan Trecartin, *Ledge*, 2014, sculptural theater with 6-channel HD Video and 5.1 soundtrack, 3D animations with Rhett LaRue, 49 minutes, 24 seconds, dimensions variable. Copyright Lizzie Fitch/Ryan Trecartin. Photo by Joshua White, (ii) Still from *CENTER JENNY*, 2013, HD Video, 53 minutes, 15 seconds. Copyright Ryan Trecartin.

SARAH LEHRER-GRAIWER Last time we talked, in early 2013 or something, you were in the middle of editing a new piece, as you are now. It's a strange time to talk about the work because so much happens in editing. And about a minute ago you were telling me how, this past year, you moved studios and your home.

RYAN TRECARTIN Yeah, we did a ton of moving. We moved our house to Burbank, and then we moved our Burbank studio to Glassell Park. We originally rented our last house to double as a studio, but for the Venice Biennale project, we needed a studio to create those particular sets. We ended up liking having a studio in which we could build sculptures and different things that don't work in a domestic setting. We go in and out of wanting a separate studio space. Right now we want one, but I can feel us already going back to wanting a house and getting rid of the studio. (*laughter*) Moving's fun.

SLG Moving's fun? Who says that? (*laughter*) Moving's the worst.

RT I was getting depressed about the fact that I lived in that Los Feliz house for five years. Even growing up, I've never lived in a house longer than that. I don't like making projects in the same places.

SLG Like a new place is inspiring and exciting for ideas, even if it's just an empty warehouse?

RT Yeah, even if there's nothing culturally different about it. It can be architecture that changes and that's it. We've been talking about moving to a different city again.

SLG This makes me think of your interest in people born in the mid-'80s and their relationship to media. Now that generation is growing up. Maybe it's not yet happening in your circle, but these past couple years, a lot of friends are having babies, you know?

So I wonder, Can ways of living stay the same? Do you want them to? This settling down, employing people, having a staff—is it part of getting older and your interest in the generational?

RT Well, I'm not really interested in things staying the same.

SLG Even if your mode is constant change.

RT It doesn't yet feel like settling down, but if it did, I might not like it. We're not interested in the same things as before—I say *we* meaning a lot of different things, but right now I'm talking about Lizzie and me primarily. When it comes to youth, I've always enjoyed it as a topic or a mode, and not necessarily as an age-related thing. It's more about the relationship to self and culture, and negotiations of freedom.

Although I do think about when people were born

in sort of an algorithmic way. It's interesting that people born at different moments in time have different relationships to ideas. It doesn't mean everyone in that age group has the same relationship—there's the general flow and then the margins.

SLG Youth as an attitude or a relationship to freedoms or self-formation makes sense. This is a side note, but I want to say that reimmersing myself in your work reminds me just how much it affects me on the level of permissiveness and what's possible. It's amazingly generative.

RT K-Hole, who were in the Triennial, wrote something on the youth mode that's like what you're describing.

SLG You've busied yourself with looking at a wide range of practices and artists, having co-curated the Triennial. I would imagine that is very different from being in the studio. What was that process like?

RT I'm still digesting the experience. Working with Lauren was amazing. She traveled a lot, and did so many studio visits. Then she would present them all and we would talk about them. She really allowed me to continue being an artist. I got to glean all this amazing research and have a huge say in it, which was incredible. And that opportunity came at a moment when the artists we were researching were not that far from me generationally. But my mind is far from that right now ...

SLG If it's too far away, we'll move on.

RT I think it's important not to be too focused on past work when you're creating new work, so I have purposely been trying to forget stuff temporarily. Like, I practice forgetting things, and then I have to try to remember them again later.

SLG How does that work?

RT Something's a thought-loop, so I picture it and then I remove it.

SLG Can you do that all in your head? Or do you keep a notebook?

RT I do, but I don't go back and read my notes much.

SLG At least once you get an idea down, then you can let yourself forget, because it's down somewhere.

RT I mean, I love remembering, too—but sometimes you have to forget in order to grow. Or something will reemerge because you pushed it away, and it comes back in a different form. That's a big part of the way we make movies. Things that we thought were over sneak back in a different form, even just words and phrases.

SLG So this new work that you're editing uses footage shot at the Masonic temple on Wilshire Boulevard, the one that the Marciano brothers are turning into a museum.

RT Remember when we first met, I was talking about starting a new phase?

SLG Yes, *CENTER JENNY* (2013) was the beginning of a new large body of work.

RT Well, the catalyst for this new phase was *Junior War* (2013), and *CENTER JENNY* was part of that. That thing sprawled the fuck all over, and we're still in that phase, basically.

The temple is this strange building that has the logic almost of a convention center and of all the spaces in a hotel that aren't hotel rooms. It's like a club; there are these big hallways that are way too big, and no windows.

SLG Did you know you were going to be shooting at the temple when you were doing *CENTER JENNY* and the movies that made up the *Priority Innfield* (2013) installation?

RT No, not at all. The opportunity actually came from Maurice Marciano seeing *Priority Innfield* in Venice. He had just gotten the temple. It was the most amazing gesture. He gave us the key, basically, and said, "I'm going to demolish the inside of this, do whatever you want until we start the renovations." It was an actual free-for-all for three months. He left us alone and gave us an opportunity to be creative—

SLG —and take a hammer to the mirrors and the sinks.

RT Yeah, there were just a couple of obvious rules, like, "Don't destroy the mosaics," which we wouldn't have done anyway, so it all flowed perfectly. That space hijacked the project. It threw in this other element, and then the whole thing expanded.

SLG You and Lizzie had mapped out a big trajectory for the work and knew what was going to happen in upcoming installments, and then that changed.

RT I don't know if it's subconscious, but we always throw in something that completely changes projects. Then it's like we're making something for the first time again. I'm glad it happens, but there are a ton of movies from that footage that have never been edited...

SLG From the temple, or from before?

RT From before, from the Burbank shoots. I still plan on editing them. There's also this character, Mark Trade, who Murphy Maxwell plays—we did a road trip right after Venice and shot a bunch of stuff with him. We returned

to the lake where we'd shot *Tommy Chat Just E-Mailed Me* in 2005, and shot some scenes there. A long time ago we started to film a movie there that we never edited. So this new body of work has footage from different years: from 2013 to now, from 2005, and even from high school. I don't think this is going to wrap up the way *Any Ever* (2009–10) did. After the Andrea Rosen Gallery show and the show that DIS is curating at the Berlin Biennial, there will still be more that we can make from this body of work. We might just move on and then come back to it later, who knows? There's always stuff on the cutting room floor. I can't believe I said "cutting room floor"!

SLG There's nothing on the floor anymore. (*laughter*) So this body of work has become extremely open-ended.

RT Yes. We developed it so we have more to mine later on.

SLG Both the Burbank shoot and the temple shoots?

RT Yeah. Part of them being inspired by this night-vision footage from high school has to do with the relationship to the camera. A few years ago, we were starting to think about new capture technologies as well as syncing software and 360-degree cameras, and the way cameras like GoPros, for example, can be put in multiple places. We developed a 360-degree set to capture stuff in the surround. People have gotten really savvy about how to act for a single camera; everyone has their own palette of languages and modes of behaving and interacting with a single camera. When you throw into the mix a whole bunch of different capture technologies, all activated at the same time, people are in a new space again—they don't know how to act for a virtual-reality setting yet. It's funny, in Burbank, when we first started shooting in this way, planning to sync a ton of cameras, this thing would happen where everyone shooting would end up sort of in the same spot, almost getting the same shot. I was still coming out of a way of directing that was for the single shot, for the edit.

Then once we got into the temple shoots, we'd already had that experience, so the people with the cameras would kind of drift off and get distracted constantly. Everyone had this mentality that someone else was capturing what needed to be captured, which freed them up. There are so many shots where the person's acting, and no one's capturing it. People were capturing these other things.

SLG That's amazing.

RT So there was a shift in the primary focus of an action. We started focusing more on context as being the main character of the movie, rather than on individual personalities. And we used different characters and their behaviors as tools and utensils for the free will of the context rather than of the individual.

i



ii



iii



iv



(i, ii, iv) Lizzie Fitch/Ryan Trecartin, stills from *Site Visit*, 2014, sculptural theater with 6-channel movie, 5.1 soundtrack, and multi-channel sound installation (total duration 49 minutes, 24 seconds). 3D Animations with Rhett LaRue. Dimensions variable. Copyright Lizzie Fitch/Ryan Trecartin. Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, 145 Regen Projects, Los Angeles, and Sprüth Magers, Berlin.



- SLG Oh, wow.
- RT So it became really hard to edit. (*laughter*) It's producing a different editing language for us. Everything feels new again.
- SLG Were the temple shoots the first time you used GoPros and drones?
- RT Yeah, and on the road trip. In Burbank we used cameras, mics, and a bunch of different small handheld cameras that were consumer-friendly, go-on-a-vacation, home-movie style cameras; they weren't coming out of the extreme-sports communities.
- Then Lizzie started getting obsessed with all the gear people use—survivalist gear, eco-tourism gear, stuff like that. One day she just bought a drone, and we became obsessed with it. We got little ones, big ones.
- SLG Are there still bigger, industry cameras being used in the temple, or is it all drones, GoPros, and portable cameras?
- RT In the temple we pretty much used all these very portable ones, and things like the 5D-cameras, which are portable too. They can do so much, but I hate using them because they don't have autofocus while you're shooting.
- SLG I read in the press release for *Ledge* that there were up to fourteen cameras shooting a scene. The effect is intense. And it seems like a logical extension of your ideas questioning where a self even lies, or on the multiplication of points of view that creates a hive mind, or a collective vision. You said the context became the priority, more than any story or individual. Are context and collective sight the same thing?
- RT No, but they're related. In the temple shoots, for instance, one of the themes is that different layers of time and different realities coexist in the same location. There are these characters in gaming outfits—they're all in green with a target on the back, referencing first-person shooter games. I was thinking of them as Anticipators. They're almost the equivalent of a wallflower at a party; their mode is to anticipate and define the limits of a given reality, but they aren't necessarily engaged. They verge on becoming hosts, but they aren't quite hosts, so they're ghosts, you know? And they aren't players either.
- SLG Are they a bit different from the Witness category of characters in *Priority Innfield* who wear the same sweat-shirt and carry cameras?
- RT Yeah, but it's relative. There's this idea of bird-watching as a metaphor for surveilling surveillance, basically watching back. One of the layers in the temple is a historic national park full of tickle animals—animals that went extinct appear in animated, user-friendly mode.
- And there are people in this area referred to as Natural Citizens too; it's a play on words.
- SLG Natural Citizens?
- RT Yeah, citizenship combined with the word *natural* is a little twisted. The character Mark Trade, who is a Natural Citizen from this place, is always talking about bird-watching. The Anticipators sort of define the parameters of a situation. They have access to all the layers of the temple, and they talk about time as if things are going to happen and also as if they've already happened simultaneously. They are almost like the access class—they have access to everything—but in their zombie state, all they can do is articulate their authority and their privileges. They end up not really having any authority.
- SLG They don't effect change.
- RT They can't. To do so they would have to actually become involved with one of the realities, and if they did, they would no longer be able to witness the entirety of all the realities. Then they'd be players, or guests, and would no longer be in this sort of omni-ghost mode. Ideas about permissions and privileges show up in this body of work a lot, not just in the way we think of privilege in the culture—as in white privilege—but also in terms of what the word can mean in different contexts. Like in software, there are permissions.
- SLG Settings, all those kinds of things.
- RT Yeah, so I am trying to explore power dynamics and how some get and use their power, paralleling that with ideas of evolution, pets, dogs, and how things become domesticated. Those are the big themes. I'm also interested in the feeling of being trapped, and in using helplessness recreationally.
- How people get different forms of access is not really explored in these movies, it's just implied that almost all the characters are proxies, in some way. They're a bit stagnant and lack the fluidity of the characters in *Any Ever*—they're pawns, but they're being accessed somehow, and the Accessors are always talking about things in terms of feelings.
- SLG Are the Accessors the Anticipators, or different classes?
- RT It's unclear on purpose, because I want people to wonder if these roles and modes are inherent to different characters, or if they are just shells and proxies. And if they are just the parameters of those shells, can anyone access those shells? That part is explored more in the Venice work...
- SLG Well, the idea of characters being ambiguously themselves or just a temporary vessel to access is certainly something you've primed us for in previous works.

There's a total instability as to what a self or an I or a person is, and it seems like it could change in the blink of an eye. A character could be as determined by a certain wig as by a line of dialogue as by a contact lens—these different cues temporarily designate character, and identity is pretty fluid.

SLG Far out, but I get it.

RT What were we talking about?

SLG I asked if these different realities are tied to geographical space. Does physical space mean anything?

RT You know how people talk about making an architecture in your head where you can place things as a way to remember them? It actually works.

SLG You've done it? The memory palace is from the Greeks.

RT Yeah, I naturally do that.

I was thinking about these containers of recollections, where somebody can access a period of time and experience it from all these different perspectives. If time can be recorded in such an expansive way, then the future and the past will completely merge into one sprawling form. Both will be as set in stone as they are malleable, because if you can navigate something that already happened and alter it and create versions of it, how's that any different from a new event, whatever that might mean? So I was thinking about these structures and how they could be equivalent to a haunted house or an abandoned building. Like an abandoned piece of the recollection is mismanaged, it doesn't add up, it has holes in its capture technology.

SLG Every recollection is like that.

RT Yeah, but imagine if it weren't like that, and then you have an experience that isn't fully formed. Potentially you'd lose your ability to pull out, or stay part of that experience. You would not be able to switch between modes anymore because you'd get locked into a role or a loop.

SLG Because there are bugs in the system. Is that scary to you? I never get the sense that there's judgment attached to any of these developments you are anticipating. That's comforting, because a lot of these speculations you're offering feel so ominous and potentially ripe for abuse and manipulation.

RT Everything is. It's part of the culture. It's not like this isn't already happening.

SLG I want to hear about the animations and the tickle pets.

RT During the Burbank shoots, which led to *CENTER JENNY*, *Comma Boat* (2013), and *Item Falls* (2013), animation was a big thing. It's been the theme in all of our movies, though I've always thought of animation conceptually. Animation is part of our evolutionary arc as a species; it's still primitive—the seeds of a complicated relationship that we're going to have with artificial intelligence.

RT We're following the transformations of the character less now—the focus is on the structure. But thinking about, say, *I-Be Area* (2007), in that piece, I-Be goes through different transformations. You're following the linearity of I-Be sprawling throughout the movie, following the concept of that person, the accumulation of that person's existence, and the way it's maintained through all of its shared experiences. Whereas now, we're looking at the vessel much more, like in a game.

SLG Like an avatar.

RT Yeah, like an avatar.

SLG When you were describing the temple shoot, you said there are different coexisting realities. How do parallel realities relate to physical space?

RT When I was scripting this work, I was thinking of it almost as an abandoned area. You know, these haunted-house movies where a group of teenagers go to a place they're not supposed to and spend a night there. They start with a dare or an urban legend. Everyone acts like it's a joke, but they're still a little scared. So I started thinking about these scary movie tropes with all this different capture technology, and about how at some point we're going to be able to capture not just different viewpoints but the raw data of an entire experience. Potentially, we will capture how different people in a room are feeling, how their feelings are generated, and also their various relationships to atmosphere, texture, color ...

SLG Is this where you see virtual reality going?

RT Way down the line, yeah. There could be a merger of future virtual reality technologies and future capture technologies. If the multiplicity of subjective experiences in a single instance can be recorded, what would that do to memory? What would the role of remembering anything be? In terms of different events, which would mean more: the actual things that happened or the way everyone felt when they happened? It will be so easy to see what actually happened that the interpretation will always be more interesting.

The same goes for experiencing something from different perspectives. If you can actually recall other people's experiences and go through them yourself, then maybe in the future it will be offensive to talk as if you're not the same as someone else.

I've always been interested in ideas of companionship and in pet culture and the way in which different people view animals. There are therapy dogs, emotional support dogs, incredible news stories about evolution and how maybe dogs domesticated humans instead of the other way around... And then cats have such a different relationship with us—their relationship to the Internet is so interesting. They have a stronger domesticated relationship to the Internet than they do to us.

SLG Isn't there a symbiotic parasite in cat poop that makes humans act crazy?

RT Maybe. I mean, I'm obsessed with cats. We have four.

SLG There are moments where science and weird voodoo actually match up.

RT Yeah, I believe it. With the tickle animals, I was thinking about what would happen if we started altering species for everyone to get along better. All dynamics would be similar to those between dogs and people, or cats and people.

I don't know why I came up with the term "tickle animals." It has to do with cartoons or the animated version of a dynamic. Like back when we were kids there were a lot of people who thought it was problematic that Disney was making polar bears smile and stuff like that. But what if there were de-extinction? What if we started bringing back these super-friendly species, with all the predatoriness taken away?

SLG They'd be domesticated in relation to what we want: our pleasure. But there's a two-way street of evolution—the animals would be engineered to become tickle animals and, at the same time, we as humans would be evolving in response to that.

RT This is just an idea of one of the layers inside of this recollection. The temple is also a national park—a government's attempt to preserve a bunch of natural concepts. The idea of trying to preserve something in its natural state is an oxymoron, in a way, because to preserve nature, we're required to, like, make a pet of it. And you're acting as if you were not part of nature.

SLG The quarantining of nature is already messing with it. So, I was wondering about the tents in the natural habitat that's abandoned—

RT The national park, yes.

SLG They relate to the park and nature, but also to squatting, settlements, Occupy, encampments.

RT We're using Occupy and an apocalyptic setting too, that's why there's this tent-row vibe.

SLG A character refers to it as a disaster center.

RT They're constantly referring to the space as if some big event happened. It's like there are all these docents roaming around describing different histories. It's the idea of big history folding back on itself and becoming this niche thing. And people are constantly kicked out of factions and such. It's like the dynamic of the Occupy movement. I liked thinking about that word literally. To *occupy* something. To occupy a sensation or a history and then to be kicked out of it and be squatting near it and trying to reinvest in it. Once you're out of it, you almost become a reality show version of it, because you're constantly describing it—but who's listening to you? It's like you're generating another reality.

SLG It becomes almost like a news broadcast, too. Occupy for sure comes up when you see the tent row in the temple, but also the current refugee crisis, and displacement—all of that seems wrapped up in it.

RT Yeah, and that weird continuum or blurring between the kennel, a zoo, a prison, or a camp. The word *camp* is so eerie. It could be all the things you just mentioned.

I can show you a little clip I was just working on. (*Pulls up video clip on computer.*) See how it has that kind of educational-video vibe? The Anticipators are constantly explaining their perspective instead of just doing stuff. In our past movies, characters explain something as if the audience was not separate from them, but explanation in the new work often gets stuck in broadcast mode, where a character talks *at* someone and not *with* someone, as if trying to reassert the fourth wall. It feels intentionally like a throwback, almost like a different way of talking is haunting the current moment.

SLG It's like a classic reality-TV thing. Not unrelatedly, the characters also talk a lot about shit and turtle heading. An animation of a dog illustrates this for us at a certain point. What do you want to say about that?

RT With the animated dogs in the movie, the idea of turtle heading is used as a metaphor for being on the verge of something and staying there—like placing a hold on it and indulging in the hold. It's also the idea that having a bond with something on the verge of happening is so addictive that things are stopped from happening.

Think of it like parties. There are two kinds: those that are really fun because they weren't planned, and the ones that were planned and were so much fun. But when you think about these second ones, the fun part was actually everything right *before* the party. It's like the post-production and pre-production are more interesting. I'm always trying to stay in the state of pre- and post-production.

Online Only

CHRISTOPHER GLAZEK

The Past Is Another Los Angeles

Ryan Trecartin's Priority Innfield



Still from *Junior War*, Ryan Trecartin, 2013.

August 21, 2015

Originally published in *Fitch/Trecartin*, a book from Zabludowicz Collection about *Priority Innfield*, a group of movies that first showed in the 2013 Venice Biennial. Christopher Glazek last wrote about Trecartin for n+1 in 2011.

AT THE END OF 2012, I left New York on the advice of Ryan Trecartin. He hadn't personally intervened to motivate my move, but his work had jolted me out of my new urbanist slumber. Downtown had failed; New York was festering with vampires—we stayed out late every night to drink each other's blood—and the best minds were getting hooked on eschatology. As we stood around at parties waiting for the world to end, we churned out demonic theologies: collapsonomics, cybersquatting, hot yoga. Occupy Wall Street briefly suggested the arrival of a genuine millennium, but the tent city at Zuccotti Park lasted only two months. Living in the city in such close quarters had paved the way for some useful apps, but it had not delivered the good life: instead of jouissance, collaboration, and communal living, we got Grindr, Trello, and Airbnb.

One day I went to PS1 to watch *Any Ever* (2009–10), the seven-part suite of movies that preceded *Priority Innfield*. The movies made me long for Miami, but I settled for Los Angeles, where I discovered the Fitch-Trecartin HQ. Whereas New York was governed by omnipotent brands and institutions, southern California was organized around an unlimited cult of celebrity. LA seemed like a utopia in Thomas More's original sense—a "no place" place without bankers, lawyers or even really a mayor. Unlike Moore's Utopia, though, LA had not dispensed with inequality, human misery, or fancy clothes. Instead of a finance culture, LA had a performance culture, and its seeming disconnection from world affairs provided an enticing backdrop for my own fantasy of earthly escape.

That LA is a captivating and problematic place to live, work, and play is just one of the hidden upshots of *Priority Innfield*, a tetralogy that veers from the Arcadian exuberance of *Any Ever* and meticulously examines both the promise and limitations of performance-based escapism. *Any Ever*, I always thought, should make you desire; *Priority Innfield* should make you worry. The series is a step back from Utopia—an alternately gloomy and hopeful foray into the conceptual minefield of success, complicity, path dependency, personal

history, and even the nature of historical causation. *Priority Innfield* isn't pessimistic, though; it's an unblinkered visualization of the slipperiness of identity and the porousness of time. We'll get over it.

NO ONE ELSE CAN SEE WHAT YOU SEE

Behind every great fortune is a great crime. In *CENTER JENNY*, we are all guilty, though we'll never really know what happened or who was responsible. The film is both a crash after a drugged-out marathon and an attempt to pick up the pieces of a night (a life? a world?) that has gone terribly wrong. As the movie begins, we stumble down a hallway getting pelted with fragments; we have a sickening feeling that much has already happened. Did our car get smashed? Did we fuck our best friend's father? Did we waive all of our rights while on acid? Despite the movie's title, our perspective is decidedly decentered: whereas in the rest of *Priority Innfield*, the characters' eyes are often glued to the camera, in *CENTER JENNY*, almost everyone looks away. We're stuck viewing the "making of" footage, the behind-the-scenes. Even the audio sounds like playback. "He's just playing a joke on you," a character explains, "no one else can see what you see." We feel abused, but also that we've transgressed. "I'm going to get in so much trouble," says a girl in a sweatshirt emblazoned with the word "Witness."

We've been deposited in a world filled with "Jennys"—a fembot army struggling to appear and sound uniform but actually looking quite motley through all of their nearly standardized sweatshirts, colored contacts, and blondish wigs. In order to ascertain whether we could possibly belong, we're looking for sources and witnesses. Who is "Sara Source"? Where did we come from? What is our name? Slowly we get reacquainted with the history of the world. We're at a university. We're rushing a sorority. We're getting quizzed about the human era—a time after dinosaurs became chickens but before humans became animations and animations became us. We learn there have been wars and revolutions, and that some Jennys are bigger than others. "I'm

privileged as fuck, get used to it," declares one of the many female protagonists claiming to be Sara Source. "My parents owned and funded the war," brags another. A third character admits to having styled the war. "Did you see those weaponized earmuffs? Those weapons, those earmuffs! I styled them! I styled them!" Over time, the war has become a nursery rhyme.

Wars have soldiers, but they also have creative directors. Were we one of them? We transfer our anxiety onto an ingenuite redhead (played by Rachel Lord) who bears the brunt of a sadistically framed, though actually quite tame, initiation ritual. Subjugation at the hands of the group becomes yet another recreational pose—BDSM, but without the bondage, the discipline, the sadomasochism or the sex. "It's a big deal," a khaki-clad Jenny tells us, "We are going to be accessing the foundation of consciousness as a university." There's no euphoria on this trip, but every arbitrary group needs an arbitrary history with its own reprogramming ritual. This is about the journey, not the destination—the university might not exist tomorrow.

While *CENTER JENNY* is preoccupied with origins (Sara Source), it's also worried about end points. Some of us may have fought in the audience revolution and some of us may have crafted weaponized earmuffs, but we all end up in Los Angeles, or, more specifically, we all end up on a fake TV set in a warehouse in Burbank, the eerie suburb that stands in approximate relation to LA as LA does to the world. There are no actual performers here, just stylists and stunt-chickens. Some provide mumbling vocals. Some perform feats of Parkour. Some draw all over us while we're still awake. Not to worry, though. No nightmare can survive sunrise.

ONE OF THE MOST ELEGANT THINGS ABOUT FACTS IS THAT I BELIEVE IN THEM

If *Priority Innfield* is one long drug-free but semipsychotic hallucination, then *Item Falls* is a peak experience.

We start out at a casting call, but before long we're firmly in the grip of hallucination, shedding our anxieties and regressing to the animation era, a time when stunt chickens were mere chicklets. Friendly archetypes float in and out of what seems to be our bedroom. The redheaded Jenny has returned, but this time she's squeaky and trusting. Unlike in *CENTER JENNY*, in *Item Falls* our perspective is literally centered. The camera seems planted in the middle of the room, which is good, because we're too blissed out to move. Luckily, our hallucinations look us in the eye.

The driving force of our trip is a producer (played by Alison Powell) who is coordinating auditions, which seem to control the progression from "first-level basic" to "second-level stupid" to "level-center." An Adele-like figure benevolently presides; as the film progresses, the producer shows off a boy band she has purchased.

Appropriately enough for a peak experience, the big questions show up. Do we have free will? Is what we're seeing real? What does it mean to be normal? "This is not a real chair," we're admonished at one point, "We animated it. It's not really here." Nothing quite makes sense, but it doesn't matter. "One of the most significant things about my stunt chickens is that I deserve a solo," says Jenny, who continues to muse about clubs and applications but without the fear and regret that fuels *CENTER JENNY*.

Jenny makes various attempts at logical argumentation but gets distracted by her own words. "Some of my friends believe that I should be an eagle," she asserts. "I believe that I'm grounded and that I should stay on the ground with the chicken, because chickens used to be dinosaurs. And it's a fact. One of the most elegant things about facts is that I believe in them." Her logical leaps take on a sharper edge when discussions amongst the group turn to family: "My parents ran one of the last print magazines . . . I was very generous to acknowledge the things that they did. It was a very common decision to make now. I fired them." Later, a boy-band member is disturbed to notice his own armpit hair: "Oh no! Look at my armpit hair. Hence my airs, hence my synonym,

hence my vibe, hence my arm!" The logical chain becomes a sort of failed genealogy. To the extent that boy band functions as a discrete gender, the speaker appears to be worried about becoming a man.

YOU FORGOT TO PULL OUT

In *Comma Boat*, the acid has worn off, but now we're on a power trip. The movie's main protagonist is a director-character played by Trecartin who oscillates between feelings of omnipotence and self-doubt. As if a posthuman, postgendered reincarnation of the Fellini character in *8 1/2*, the director gloats and frets about professional and ethical transgressions. "I know I lied to get ahead," he admits, force-feeding these lines to a character named Ethno-Anthro Nark. "I've made up so many different alphabets just to get ahead in my field." The director is fancier now, but the fear nags that he might be repeating himself "like a dumb soldier ova and ova and ova and ova." The metaconnection to the artist's own career, while obvious, is also a decoy. All art, at some level, is about the artist. Here, reflexivity is the surface level, providing a decodable veneer that encases something more unsettling.

Where *CENTER JENNY* sounds an alarm about the artist's complicity and helplessness within a system of indecipherable tribal rituals (and, more broadly, about any individual's powerlessness with respect to historical change), *Comma Boat* raises the possibility that these worries are essentially bullshit, convenient red herrings that disguise a deeper, more terrible truth: that in fact we have been in control all along, that we've stage-managed every aspect of this dream, and that our actions have not only damaged our own lives but potentially the lives of others too.

Arbitrary power is what drives the mock-authoritarian fantasy in *Comma Boat*, but it's also a joke. "I'm going to name a daycare after her," the director proclaims as punishment for an underling who uses words he doesn't understand, "but it's going to be very gas chamber oriented. Like, you'll go in,

but you won't come out." These are idle threats—the director is needling, but his subordinates are hardly cowering. "I'm going to put you at the end of a pier," he says soon after, "and you're going to stay there forever. I'm not going to do anything, you're just going to stay there." The pier scheme sounds Warholian, but it's not likely to come to fruition.

As with the rest of *Priority Innfield*, literal performance is delayed or refracted into pre- and postproduction. A group of singers seems to be continually testing levels, reliably affirming they sound "real good" without ever beginning the music video they appear to be filming.

The director worries he's not being sufficiently documented. He also worries about procreation: "There used to be a moment in time where people would peck on the lips and people would give them awards because of this thing . . . cinematic things." The director forces a sea punk girl to make out with a boy and then castigates them for being disgusting and "forgetting to pull out." "Ew, you're gonna start a family!" he chides. Babies, you might say, are the ultimate form of documentation, but they have short half-lives and are rarely faithful reproductions of the original. There are no babies in *Priority Innfield*.

The movie suggests that the director can no longer be educated. He has entered a fantasy world and won't come out. The predicament is summed up in a voiceover from the singer Lauren Devine: "What you gonna say now, you're too late now, I'm in LA now."

I'VE BEEN RIDING THESE WOODS SINCE I WAS THREE YEARS OLD

In *Junior War*, a throng of high schoolers congregates at night for a party in the woods sometime in the year 2000. A band plays, the kids get drunk, the boys and girls tepidly flirt, and groups deploy into cars for the purpose of destroying mailboxes, TP'ing houses, breaking lawn ornaments, and sparring with the police. The movie is composed entirely of footage Trecartin took

during his senior year of high school in exurban Ohio; as such, it baits the viewer with genealogical significance. The movie is incontrovertibly “source material” dangling the possibility that we’ve finally unearthed “Sara Source,” but it’s also rigorously repurposed, just as any #tbt on social media marks the present more reliably than it renders the past.

In the context of the tetralogy, *Junior War* looks like a time capsule from “the human era,” where themes and phrases from the other three films, searching for keys, smashing, farting, portentously recur. All of Trecartin’s trademarks are here—frenetic pacing, musical punctuation, carnivalesque destruction, adolescent dialect—but this time the Trecartin-verse is forged out of real-life coeds. “We found a golf ball, a tennis ball, and a baseball,” a boy proudly declares, underlining the male brain’s infinite capacity for pointless taxonomy. Other teens display aptitude for legalism, complaining about a policeman who was “wrongfully accusing” and “didn’t have probable cause to fucking pull us over.” Another boy at odds with law enforcement combatively declares, “I’ve been riding these woods since I was three years old. I know all these woods! If anything I’m going that way,” yielding a stream of teen poetry whose peculiarity might go unnoticed but for its resonance with the rest of *Priority Innfield’s* unruly syntax.

Are these the formative experiences that gave rise, a decade later, to the artist Ryan Trecartin? To the extent that *Priority Innfield* is an exercise in retroreflection, in revisiting the past and also reshaping it, *Junior War* looks more like the diary of a time traveler who has re-entered a historical moment and turbulently restructured it.

Most of the footage for the movie was recorded in night vision, a style that recalls both *The Blair Witch Project*, which came out in 1999, a year before Trecartin’s footage was shot, and *Zero Dark Thirty*, which came out in 2012, a year before *Junior War* was completed. The generation that graduated in rural America in the early 2000s is the same generation that continues to fight and die in Afghanistan. As Orwell has written, “The battle of Waterloo was won on

the playing-fields of Eton,” but the battles “of all subsequent wars have been lost there.” The youth in *Junior War* are expressly militarized; they’re also innocents who venture into the woods in search of the supernatural.

POSTTRAUMATIC

All remembering is editing—an attempt to create what scholars of collective memory call a “usable past”—a utilitarian myth that helps cement the identity of some present-day groups. In *Junior War*, as in the rest of the tetralogy, the editing is intentional and aggressive—but it’s not clear that the past it creates is usable. When memory fails and identities fail to successfully form—in a person or in a polity—scholars often invoke the category of trauma. For the trauma victim, the past cannot be made usable because it’s been blocked. Nothing makes sense—there’s no millennium to foreshadow. In *Priority Innfield*, the failure to manipulate the past into a usable script isn’t evidence of mental illness—it’s evidence of a commitment to recreation over strategy. Re-creating the past or planning the future can help pave the way for various presents, but it can also be pure fun. Living in the moment doesn’t mean living in the present.

The arrow of time—whichever direction it points—is fraught with guilt. To age is to decline: that’s what we’re always told. To trace is to blame: that’s what we’re afraid of. To the extent that *Priority Innfield* confounds our understanding of sequencing, iteration, and cause and effect, it also lets us off the hook for crimes of chronology. By the end we may feel confused, exhausted, and epistemologically spent, but we also feel exonerated. We feel disempowered, but ready for play. In the end, *Priority Innfield* is posttraumatic in the sense that it scrutinizes but ultimately rejects trauma as the structuring principle of memory and personal history. The world is complex. Some things are bad. We do not escape the past, but the past doesn’t escape us either.

If you like this article, please [subscribe](#) to n+1. +

Art in America

Past and Future Camera: Lizzie Fitch and Ryan Trecartin's New Movie

by Brian Droitcour

April 15, 2016



Ryan Trecartin: *Temple Time*, 2016, single-channel HD video, 49 minutes.
Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.

A nervous girl is sitting and fidgeting in a room. “Can you tell the difference between a camera and a camera?” asks an off-screen voice. The girl breaks her downcast gaze to furtively glance at the two cameras recording her. “Yes,” she whispers. This is one of the first scenes in Lizzie Fitch and Ryan Trecartin’s twenty-minute movie *Permission Streak* (2016). The question of cameras and the differences between them is one that Fitch and Trecartin may have asked themselves while editing their latest works. They used to shoot with one camera at a time and simulated a multiplicity of perspectives with montage. But in recent years their shoots have involved several handheld digital cameras, as well as drones (operated remotely by Fitch), and GoPros attached to actors’ bodies.

Permission Streak and the three other works in the “Site Visit” suite (all 2016), on view at New York’s Andrea Rosen Gallery through April 20, have all the hallmarks that Fitch and Trecartin’s movies are known for: disorienting editing and fragmented narratives; soundtracks with heavy bass and ambient noise; garish pancake makeup and K-Mart collage costuming; dialogue that sutures familiar colloquialisms and dictions into an alien creole; and the sculptural screening rooms constructed for gallery presentations, which use furnishings from Ikea and the Home Depot to remix the generic domestic environments where other audiences might be watching the same movies over the Internet. But the proliferation of footage sources is one of several stylistic innovations that make new movies like those in “Site Visit”—*Temple Time*, *Permission Streak*, *Stunt Tank*, and *Mark Trade*—strikingly different from earlier ones by the artists, who have been collaborating for fifteen years. Scenes have been shot outdoors using natural light. Some of the actors wear little to no makeup, and chose outfits from their everyday attire instead of donning ones designed by the artists and their crew. Earlier movies were carefully scripted, but the new ones include Trecartin’s directorial instructions, actors’ spontaneous commentary, flubbed lines, and physical bloopers. There’s also more physical movement. In the breakthrough suite “Any Ever” (2009–10), characters sat in one place and delivered monologues, but in “Site Visit,” they walk, explore, and perform stunts. *Temple Time* has GoPro footage of skydivers in freefall. Segments like this made the exhibition at times feel like the artists briefly leaped out of the tightly constructed world of their art for a gulp of fresh air.

Many of the new developments in “Site Visit” were first introduced in “Priority Innfield,” a set of four movies that premiered at the 2013 Venice Biennale. They were inspired in part by Trecartin’s rediscovery of camcorder footage he shot in high school, which he edited into *Junior War* (2013) and released along with “Priority Innfield.” *Junior War* shows teenagers grappling with the oppressive freedom of white Midwestern suburbia. They tool around in minivans, vandalizing mailboxes, and strewing lawns with toilet paper. They confront the cops. They experiment with drugs and alcohol at house parties and raves in the woods. When Trecartin watched his old footage it struck him as a time capsule of obsolete attitudes toward being filmed. If high schoolers today are in the habit of sharing their downtime on Snapchat, in the nineties encountering a camera at a party was a surprise. (“Ancestors weren’t capture ready all the time,” as a character in *Temple Time* says.) Cries of “stop filming me!” and “don’t point that at me!” sound as a litany throughout *Junior War*. While the kids protest at first, Trecartin keeps his camera on them until they relax. One boy smiles, then looks nervously to either side, and then, indifferent, picks his nose. A girl who initially doesn’t want to be filmed confides to the camera once she’s drunk. *Junior War* is about adolescents testing the limits of their social environments and of their bodies, while simultaneously negotiating an unfamiliar regime of surveillance.

Each body of work that Fitch and Trecartin have produced—sometime between the filming of *Junior War* and its postproduction—feels loosely affiliated with a certain genre of camerawork. *A Family Finds Entertainment*, 2004, is redolent of home videos made by kids with camcorders—as if Trecartin’s high-school habits of cinematography lingered at the back of his mind even as he tried to invent new ones. The videos included in “Any Ever” (2007-2010) use the frontal directness of Skyping and vlogging, imagining the webcam’s lens as a means by which selfhood leaks into otherness and vice versa. Though the works Fitch and Trecartin have made since moving to Los Angeles in 2010 retain those flavors of social media and DIY video, they have more to do with Hollywood’s broadcast media. Most have been shot on a Burbank soundstage, or on location. The multiple people named Jenny in *Center Jenny*, 2013, part of “Priority Innfield,” run around screaming as they compete for an obscure prize, like contestants on a game show or reality TV. *Temple Time* feels more cinematic. It was shot in an abandoned Masonic Temple on Wilshire Boulevard, which the Marciano brothers (of clothing brand Guess) bought to house their art collection. They let Fitch and Trecartin run wild in the derelict space until renovations began in spring 2014. The temple’s urban ruin is a wilderness to *Temple Time*’s characters, who fill a cavernous, windowless ballroom with tents and bug out like they’re at Burning Man. The way they explore the dilapidated interior’s various levels recalls horror movies, action movies, and adventure shows for children.

In a conversation last week, Fitch and Trecartin told me they think of the LA works—both in “Priority Innfield” and “Site Visit”—as being about gaming. While the exploratory mode of *Temple Time* has an affinity with fiction film, it also mimics the behavior of video-game avatars: seeking objects, identifying their purpose, finding the rules and limits of their world. (Rhett LaRue, who has acted in Fitch and Trecartin’s movies and worked extensively on their postproduction, has built a 3-D model of the Masonic temple using game-design software, and the artists plan to make a video game.) That orientation determines the characters’ attentive relationship to everything directly outside their bodies. They talk about what they see more than what they feel. That’s what makes the “Site Visit” movies different from “Any Ever,” where characters explore and transform their inner worlds by externalizing their imaginations. And if Trecartin’s high-school classmates in *Junior War* were actively, even violently, engaging with their physical environment yet timid and passive about being filmed, the characters in *Temple Time* are all too familiar with cameras but feel lost and amazed in the world.

“How did this get here?” is to *Temple Time* what “Don’t film me” is to *Junior War*—but in *Temple Time* the characters are the ones who created the situation they’re in even if they don’t remember doing so. Everything is always new. “I went in the basement and I saw something so I got his camera,” one character, played by Trecartin, says, pointing to a GoPro on his head. “I’ve never used a toilet before,” says a guy loitering in a bathroom stall. In one of the tents in the ballroom-forest, a woman says: “It feels

like someone is watching us.” She’s wearing a contact mic. The guy beside her says: “I’ve been filming you with this camera I just found.” The way the characters of *Temple Time* move through their surroundings seems to double the way Fitch and Trecartin make art. The habits and modes of behavior catalyzed and normalized by cameras, by social media, and by reality TV have, in the artists’ eyes, hardened into artifacts. Those norms belong to a cluttered media environment where they exist as parts that the artists can observe with wonder, use, and discard before continuing to explore.

ART



ART

LIZZIE FITCH AND RYAN TRECARTIN

March 19 2016 - April 16 2016

Marcel Duchamp's notion that the viewer completes a work of art has rarely found a more persuasive expression than the delirious installations of Trecartin and Fitch. In their fever-dream cineplexes, more hours of footage are screened simultaneously than can be ever absorbed in one visit, forcing—or freeing—each viewer to become the de-facto editor of a new director's cut. Here, a miscellany of seating, from rustic (faux boulders, hunter's tree seats) to loungelike, sprawls through four darkened rooms, as, onscreen, merry-prankster gangs of hes, shes, and theys play fast and loose with the laws of time, space, and cosmetics, in locations ranging from a dilapidated Masonic temple to the seashore. This is "terra nonconforma," as one actor puts it, a world in which language is as fluid as identity. Tying to parse the frenetic dialogue can feel like eavesdropping on the future. "One of the reasons you don't have a boyfriend is that you're such a weapon against reality," one character hears. Bad for dating, perhaps, but transporting for art.

Rosen (<http://www.newyorker.com/goings-on-about-town/venue/rosen>)

525 W. 24th St.

New York, NY 10011

<http://www.andrearosengallery.com> (<http://www.andrearosengallery.com>)

212-627-6000

AO

NEW YORK — LIZZIE FITCH /
RYAN TRECARTIN AT ANDREA
ROSEN GALLERY THROUGH
APRIL 20TH, 2016

April 12th, 2016



Lizzie Fitch/Ryan Trecartin, (Installation View), all images © Lizzie Fitch/Ryan Trecartin,
Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, Photos: Pierre Le Hors

For their first exhibition at [Andrea Rosen Gallery](#) following the announcement of their representation by the New York dealer, [Lizzie Fitch](#) and [Ryan Trecartin](#) have delivered an ambitious debut, translating typical gallery experiences into a staggering, surreal encounter with cultural formats and blurred informational structures. Puzzling for those familiar with the gallery's original architecture, the artists have realized a maze-like structure, composed of four conjoined chambers that usher visitors through a range of senses and perceptual exercises. Absorbingly eerie in their arcane interiors and radiant colors, each room installation compliments an equally disorienting video on view. Balanced between a corporate office room and suburban movie theater, one room suggests a considerably more traditional viewing experience, while another one asks viewers to perch on bar stools alongside faux rocks.



Lizzie Fitch/Ryan Trecartin, (Installation View)



Lizzie Fitch/Ryan Trecartin, (Installation View)

While the films often scrap narrative coherence, the viewing experience itself feels particularly focused around driving the content of each film forward. Ever-shifting landscapes and overtly camp acting counter the changing physical contents of each viewing space, implementing vague auto-biographical references dispersed throughout each video, while also blending in references to

teen slasher flicks, high school romantic-comedies, and the like, although loyalty to one genre or plotline rarely seems to limit the duo's linguistic scope and formal inventions in narrative, character and setting.



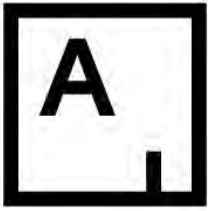
Lizzie Fitch/Ryan Trecartin, (Installation View)

Since their graduation from Rhode Island School of Design in the early 2000s, Fitch and Trecartin have continued one of the most original and consistently strong collaborations in the contemporary art scene, while each maintains uniformly intriguing solo careers. The strength and reception for their collaborations, however, has been particularly enthusiastic, proven by their participations in some of the leading global venues including the [Whitney Museum of American Art](#), the [KW Institute for Contemporary Art](#), and the 55th [Venice Biennale](#).

The exhibition closes April 16th.

Lizzie Fitch and Ryan Trecartin is on view at Andrea Rosen Gallery through April 20, 2016.

— O.C. Yerebakan



Horror Movies Meet Reality TV in Lizzie Fitch and Ryan Trecartin's New York Show

ARTSY EDITORIAL
BY
IAN EPSTEIN

APR 11TH, 2016 8:00 PM



Installation view of Retreatery Butte (2016). Photo by Pierre Le Hors. © Lizzie Fitch / Ryan Trecartin. Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery.

When Maurice Marciano, one of the founders of the Guess clothing label, saw [Lizzie Fitch and Ryan Trecartin's](#) sprawling, multi-channel video installation, *Priority Innfield* (2013), at the 55th Venice Biennale, the work struck a chord. Around this time, Marciano (who is also a major collector) purchased the landmarked Scottish Rite Masonic Temple on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles with his brother Paul, with intentions of transforming it into into a private museum. Designed by

California artist and architect Millard Sheets, the temple is an eccentric structure, spanning nearly 90,000 square feet over four floors, including a 2,100-seat auditorium; it had become a decades-old time capsule, left largely unused since the 1990s. Marciano offered Fitch and Trecartin the opportunity to use the space for a future work—an opportunity the artists jumped at. And so, Fitch and Trecartin were given free reign of the sprawling structure, limited only by a simple request: Don't destroy the mosaics.

With the keys to the temple in hand, the duo and their collaborators had the ability to use the structure from the walls in. They chose to integrate what they recorded there with their growing archive of footage, which has come to supply the source material for their multi-screen installations. In their current exhibition, Fitch and Trecartin give a New York audience a glimpse of the latest results of this endeavor: a suite of four “sculptural theaters” accessed through a dark hallway at Andrea Rosen Gallery on 24th Street. The exhibition (which is Fitch and Trecartin's first solo show with the gallery since they joined the roster in 2012) builds on the narratives of two previous works, *Priority Innfield* and *Site Visit* (2014)—the latter of which was the subject of Trecartin's exhibition at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in 2014–15.



Scottish Rite Masonic Temple, Wilshire Blvd, Los Angeles, California (16). Photo by Ken Lund via Flickr.

Upon entering the gallery, viewers are prompted to grab a set of headphones and immerse themselves in the duo's high-velocity, madcap world. The majority of what is on display comes from video shot inside the temple, but it also draws on footage shot in the artists' Burbank studio, on a road trip taken after the Venice Biennale, and clips from a grabbag of other time periods—some dating back to Trecartin's high school years. Through editing, Trecartin mixes scenes from across

the archive of footage that he and Fitch have created over the course of their long collaboration. When the video cuts away to a new shot, it's hard to tell whether the scene is starting over, picking up where a previous one left off, or moving on to a new one.

At the temple, Fitch, Trecartin, and dozens of collaborators crowded into the building with GoPros, Handycams, DSLRs, drones, tripods—more or less every contemporary video capture technology available. Each person took on new and old vestiges of the artists' ever-evolving, slippery characters; clad in shoddy costumes, wigs, and beauty products, they faced off against each other, wielding these different recording technologies. The plot they build is challenging, often slipping off into tangents and introducing new personalities. The acting is energetic, as individuals slide between roles constantly, destabilizing any sense of a fixed cast of characters. It almost feels as though the actors are trying to change faster than capture devices can record them.



Installation view of Lake Anticipation (2016). Photo by Pierre Le Hors. © Lizzie Fitch / Ryan Trecartin. Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery.

Some of the action occurs on a conventional stage, which seems incidental—perhaps a passing nod to the way things were in the days of single camera viewpoints and Hollywood scripts. True to Trecartin's past working methods, the actors (who extend to include cameramen) follow abbreviated scripts until the text ends, and then keep going. They set off smoke bombs and pilot drones down unlit hallways; they pop open beers, smoke pipes, and scream in glee and terror. They wreck everything from the walls in.

The scenarios that unfold onscreen mix horror movie tropes with those of reality TV, recalling everything from *The Bachelor* or *RuPaul's Drag Race* to genre originators like MTV's *Fear*. The sculptural theaters serve as connectors between artist and audience, effectively extending the world

onscreen into the gallery. The largest room contains a broad wooden deck pierced by a few stray trees and laden with hunting equipment. The setup evokes both the predatory and the voyeuristic aspects of surveillance, while multiple feeds of video play on an enormous projected screen. An adjacent room offers a nautical setting, locating viewers on padded seating pulled from a pontoon boat (some seats even retain their cupholders). The environment emphasizes the ways in which we are simultaneously captive to media and transported by it—the way media can act as a vehicle that brings us into alternate realities. All four sculptural theaters present similar (though differently executed) arguments about our relationships to media.



Installation view of Stunt Tank (2016). Photo by Pierre Le Hors. © Lizzie Fitch / Ryan Trecartin. Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery.

This layering of videos alongside elaborate viewing conditions invites viewers to engage in the exhibition, in a way that might resemble a “Choose Your Own Adventure” novel. But as viewers embark on one of several possible routes through the exhibition and gain access to Fitch and Trecartin’s dark, overwhelming world, the experience may become comparable to being a tourist in a big city without a map. As time elapses within the exhibition, a sense of suspense prevails, leaving the viewer yearning for answers and consumed by the chase.

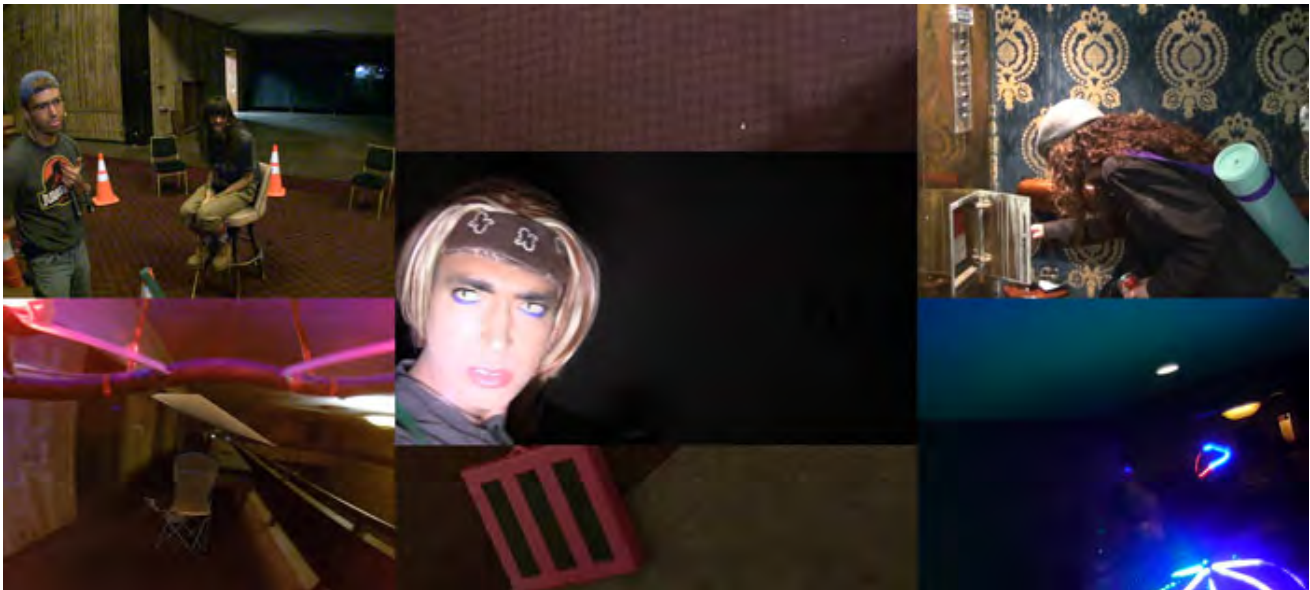
—Ian Epstein

“Lizzie Fitch / Ryan Trecartin” is on view at Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, Mar. 22–Apr. 16, 2016.

REVIEWS

TANGLED WEB: LIZZIE FITCH AND RYAN TRECARTIN AT ANDREA ROSEN, NEW YORK

BY **Alex Greenberger** POSTED 04/08/16 1:15 PM
Through April 16



Ryan Trecartin, *Temple Time*, 2016, single-channel HD video, 49 minutes 23 seconds.
©RYAN TRECARTIN/COURTESY ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY, NEW YORK AND REGEN PROJECTS, LOS ANGELES

Hyped-up, fast-paced filmmaking has become the norm—*Mad Max: Fury Road*, this year’s Oscar winner for editing, packs 2,700 cuts into its two-hour runtime. But even by George Miller’s standards, Lizzie Fitch and Ryan Trecartin’s turbo-charged videos are excessive. Most shots don’t last more than half a second, and, in the rare cases when they do, the camera is in constant motion. The work rarely contains a plot. Sexually and morally ambiguous characters simply jabber on about nothing in nondescript spaces that mirror the environments Fitch and Trecartin have constructed for the viewers to immerse themselves in the work. These environments often include bland household furniture installed in odd ways, a sly subversion of a home theater, providing a contrast to the artists’ frenetic style. Onscreen, there’s always too much and too little going on, but that’s the point. These videos are about being distracted.

In four new videos on view now [at Andrea Rosen](#), Fitch and Trecartin use split screens, superimpositions, jump cuts, digital distortions, and other techniques to heighten viewers' short attention spans. Computer-generated images of animals also appear, with no apparent shred of logic. The new videos are heavy on nonsensical banter about drinking, bodily functions, and suffering general boredom. All of this is fairly standard for Fitch and Trecartin, but they also go in a new direction, transplanting their characters into nature. Or, at least, some strange approximation of nature. For whatever reason, camping is a unifying theme here, whether it's done in-doors during an intoxicated slumber party, as is the case in most of the videos, or in a mosquito-bitten backyard.

Distraction, of course, remains the *mise en scene*. In a time when millions of videos on the Internet vie for users' attention, I get the feeling that Fitch and Trecartin's characters would much rather be checking their phones than doing anything else—including appearing in a Fitch and Trecartin video. In *Mark Trade* (2016), the titular protagonist, a drunken and off-putting man with long hair and oddly colored contacts, says, "This used to be a lake, but I can't get any fucking service anywhere now." The artists' faithfulness to the Internet's hysterical diversion renders the characters mysteriously underdeveloped.



Ryan Trecartin, *Permission Streak* (still), 2016, single-channel HD video, 21 minutes 17 seconds.
©RYAN TRECARTIN/COURTESY ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY, NEW YORK AND REGEN PROJECTS, LOS ANGELES

Likewise, all of the videos are lavishly installed in rooms where few things make sense. Sound effects—the patter of rain, the whoosh of a breeze—created by an online generator play throughout the show, and gym mats and a makeshift bunk bed sometimes appear in the same room. There's no binding theme, but it only adds to the show's schizoid intensity.

In the most elaborate installation, titled *Lake Anticipation* (2016), a video called *Temple Time* appears in what looks like an upscale campsite, replete with two beanbags, oddly designed chairs, real trees, and empty hot-coal bins. The video has the clearest scenario of the four—it evokes a haunted-house reality show where ghost hunters look for supernatural activity in an abandoned Masonic temple. A *Blair Witch Project* knockoff video in which computer-generated weasels seem to be supernatural creatures, it features little true horror, but is unnerving, no less.

Digital technology rarely appears in these works, but it always has an implicit presence. Just as these characters seem not to notice the screeching, unseen ghosts in *Temple Time*, Internet users are too busy

going from website to website to care about the insidious, invisible forces online—search algorithms, computer viruses, and surveillance systems. That's always been a part of Fitch and Trecartin's work, but never before has their dialogue with their cultural milieu been so mature. Whereas in the past the sinister side of our obsession with technology has been either too much at the forefront or too obscure, the artists have now struck a balance between confounding chit-chat and heady critique. And, like any good viral video, you want to see these new works again and again, looking for information you may have missed the first time.

Let the video roller coaster ride begin

Ryan Trecartin's films, created with Lizzie Fitch, trace the impact of technology on modern life

By Cristina Ruiz. From [Frieze daily edition](#)

Published online: 17 October 2014

The internet and the cultural innovations it has introduced are changing the ways in which we speak, act and relate to one another—but advances in technology are outpacing our ability to understand them. These, broadly, are the underlying themes of Ryan Trecartin's films, which are made in collaboration with fellow US artist Lizzie Fitch. The fast-paced editing, hallucinatory animations, loud soundtracks and characters' disjointed speech and actions merge to create portraits of the YouTube generation that are at once exciting, disturbing and alienating assaults on our senses. Four of the duo's films made waves at the Venice Biennale in 2013. Now they are on show at the Zabłudowicz Collection in Kentish Town, north London in the artists' first show in Britain. We spoke to Trecartin just after it opened on 2 October.

***The Art Newspaper:* Your installations seem designed to induce total surrender in the viewer. Is that their purpose?**

Ryan Trecartin: I definitely think of them as providing an experience that, at first, functions similarly to a ride and almost uses the language of a theme park or a natural history museum. The movies are intended to be entertaining, but this is always merged with the ideas that drive the material and the conceptual basis for the work. I hope that, after surrendering to the experience, there's a process of reading the work that can happen over multiple viewings. I think of them as something that gets read rather than just watched.

There is a hallucinatory, nightmarish quality to your films. You examine the way technology is changing our behaviour, language and relationships. Is there an element of warning built into that?

One of the reasons I work with the movie form is that you can suspend multiple intentions or strains of thought within the same work. Sometimes it's just about exploring and revealing things, and trying to show a reflection of something that enables you to see it in a more raw way than how you experience it in real life, where you're possibly desensitised to it. I don't necessarily think of warnings. I think that everything is potentially positive and exciting, and it's just about how technology gets used. The works perhaps seem nightmarish because the darker side of things is a symptom of really exciting, creative changes in the world. Destruction, perversity and dysfunction can ultimately allow for movement and for states of being to evolve.

But some of the people and situations are really menacing.

The characters sometimes perform cruel actions that would mean something very different if you were in a virtual state where getting rid of someone doesn't mean you're actually getting rid of them.

Like in a video game?

Yes. So an action can mean many different things, depending on what reality is being maintained at the time. I think that certain topics are really scary in one context and then potentially playful, creative and inventive in another context, so I like to show that. Then I complicate the context it's actually happening in, so that it remains unclear.

A lot of your work seems to focus on today's self-publicising, narcissistic, reality-TV youth culture. How do you think your work will evolve as you get older?

It's evolved a lot since the first movies. People associate the way in which language is evolving with youth culture, and for a long time that was the place where it was acceptable to butcher and invent language. But if you really listen to people of all ages, you can hear that this extends to all of us. We're staying younger and younger as a species—not just physically, but also in our mindset. Culture is not something that is just handed down to people any more; we're all making it together, and this has a profound effect on language. Technology also accelerates the way in which language is changing. I like to take things that people see as "tween" and put them in more adult and more destructive, friction-filled settings, and draw attention to the fact that youth is no longer related to the number of years lived.

You don't speak like the characters in your films, though.

The characters exaggerate, extend and manipulate these changes in language. The movies are not documentaries—in other words, unmediated versions of real life. I have lots of different ways of behaving or speaking in different situations. This is a formal situation—an interview—and it differs from the way I talk when the context shifts. People have multiple ways of behaving rather than static states of being that they maintain consistently; it's like accents and ways of exchanging language that are no longer tied to specific cultures or places. The internet has given everyone a bird's-eye view of the world.

It must be easier for younger viewers to understand your work, compared with older ones who are less familiar with new technology.

I feel as though it's more a state of mind. There are older people I know who are really quick to understand how things are changing and evolving, just as much as younger people. People who

are raised with access to the internet, movies, reality TV and the news are obviously able to understand certain things in my work that those who weren't around [those media] will never understand in the same way. At the root of the movies, though, are basic issues about humanity and relationships that anyone can understand.

There are narrative snippets in your work, but never enough to construct a coherent story. Is that intentional?

I do think of the movies as stories. Although they have a non-linear feeling, there's actually a mesh of many different linearities that don't necessarily function in complementary directions. I don't try to hide information from the story, but I like showing the secondary information around it. So in *Center Jenny* [2013], which is about an educational system where people are learning about their ancestors through misguided forms of sorority culture, there's a character named Sara Source who brags about how super-privileged she is, and how her family funded a war. So there's this big, upsetting idea that never gets developed, and it's clearly a part of the plot, although it's mostly used to shine light on less important things. It doesn't get resolved in any way that's going to feel satisfying. She also tells us that her vacations involve dropping canned food on poor people. If I were to make a mainstream movie—and I definitely want to make some in the future—that idea, or a movie's main thread, would be developed a lot more directly. But I don't feel that that's what this work is about right now. Articulating the nuances around the reflections of larger plot ideas sometimes has more impact than just following the larger plot idea exclusively.

Your characters often speak in banalities—a lot of them very funny—and then they'll suddenly say something profound.

It's really important to have the more profound moments surrounded by entertainment. That's a reflection of the world we live in, and it's also how I like to receive information. Humour can be a great delivery system for complicated ideas.

There's so much in your work that the viewer almost needs to watch a film and then process it before coming back to it.

The plots have spaces in them that are meant to merge with memory or lived experience. I think ideas congeal or start to coalesce during time away. There's a process of mingling them with your own associations that needs to happen, and that process is important for picking up a work and then leaving it and then picking it up again. It's a bit like reading, in that way. I hope that the movies can be experienced through different framing devices, and that brings out different aspects of the content. When people watch them on Vimeo, where they can stop and start them whenever they want, that brings out different content than if they see them in a cinema, where you're thinking of things as scenes in a cinematic narrative that moves from A to B—or in an

exhibition space, where it's much more game-like, where you're navigating the space and going in and out as you want.

Ryan Trecartin was born in Webster, Texas, in 1981 and received his BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2004. He currently lives and works in Los Angeles.

Where to see it

Zabludowicz Collection, London: Lizzie Fitch/Ryan Trecartin "Priority Innfield" (until 21 December) displays films originally made for the 2013 Venice Biennale and one new work.

Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin: "Site-Visit" (until 11 January 2015) consists of a sequence of chambers with reclining armchairs and club music leading to a huge movie theater hall where the artists' newest multi-screen movie, shot in a former Masonic temple in Los Angeles, is on display. Deck chairs, sun loungers and rows of cinema seats are strewn around the vast space.

Regen Projects, Los Angeles: A new expansive installation in the form of a room-size tent structure and multi-channel movie, evolving the movie-viewing experience and the artists' signature sculptural theatres even further (22 October – 26 November).

Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing: Four films from Trecartin's "Any Ever" series (2009-11) are included in "The Los Angeles Project" (until 9 November).

SUPPLIES, SITUATIONS, SPACES

LIZZIE FITCH
IN CONVERSATION WITH
OSSIAN WARD

Do you have a sense in which you usually conduct interviews like this? Do you do them with Ryan or separately?

It depends on the situation. It's sometimes nicer to do them one on one, because I feel like a lot of times we expect the other person to say all that we want to say and as a result don't say all that we might otherwise.

Is that the way the collaboration works, in that you're ending each other's sentences? Do you find that you need to have space so you can do your own thing and Ryan can do his bit? Is it accurate to say that you're the sculptor and he's the filmmaker, or how do you see it?

Well, that is actually one of the bigger misconceptions about the way Ryan and I work – the idea of a clear divide where he works on the movies and I make the physical stuff. We work with each other in a lot of different ways. Often we'll be in the same room, working on a sculpture, working on an installation, on a sculptural theatre, on a movie – usually we are working on all of those things at any given time – and at other times we will work separately for extended periods on specific elements of the work.

So you're behind the camera one minute and in front of the camera, as one of the actors, the next.

On set there is no standard because the way the movies are shot is really dependent on where we are, what kind of shoot it is, and what performers we are working with. The planning for shoots also happens in many different ways, though in general it starts with Ryan putting together the network of themes, imagery, and language that he wants to go into the script and then us beginning to talk it over once it's developed to a certain

point. That's a big generalization, but often true. Recently, I've started having fun editing too. It's really hard to peel apart or delineate what is a typical situation for us collaboratively – the way we work together moulds itself to whatever we are doing. We are both super-independent people; we like to focus. We can both go away for days or a week and come back and talk about something, but we also sit together in the same room day after day.

How important is the creation of the sculptural sets, the decorations, the makeup and everything, when what you are describing in the films is almost a virtual world? Do you have to somehow make that realm real or are there physical elements within that world that come out of the scripts?

We are continuously making "supplies" for ourselves, we shop for things and we think of every object as a word or like lines in a movie. A lot of times they're just themes or ideas we're tossing around during scriptwriting, but equally what we build can inform what the script will be. Ryan often writes furiously, he can also spend a month on a script, but there are moments when the script is written the night before or it's done all together. The actors are generally our friends, collaborators and fellow artists, and they understand this process, adlibbing and pulling in lines from all over the place, to weave together something that becomes the dialogue or narrative action.

It's as if you've got these different kinds of glue, the glue could be the words or it could be something else. I like the idea that you call them "supplies", because it also adds into this utilitarian, industrial look to all the physical accoutrements – like kitchen units

or IKEA furniture. Is it a case of buying this stuff or does it get reinvented as you go along?

With the *Any Ever* movies that's how we were making sets, in this really sculptural way. Sometimes it had to do with how the products we bought were branded – you know, it might be a welding table called "Nomad" – that becomes a way of engaging with that object. For the latest project, *Site Visit* [2014 shown at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin], shot at the Scottish Rite Masonic Temple on Wilshire here in Los Angeles, we were really very specific about the kinds of things we were bringing into the set because it was such a specific place. It had an auditorium that seats 500 people, a banquet hall that's 10,000 sq.ft. of uninterrupted space, it's dingy – no one had been in there for fifteen years – and it smelled really bad. At first I was kind of horrified by it.

Normally you have more control over the spaces you use...

Most of the other movies were shot in a home of some sort – all domestic spaces. And we always shoot at night because we don't want there to be any exterior. But then I guess you let a lot more chaos happen and you just have a completely different relationship to the camera.

Of the larger installations I have seen, at the Pinault Foundation for example [*Public Crop*, 2011; *Local Dock*, 2011; and *Porch Limit*, 2012, shown in *Prima Materia*, Punta della Dogana, Venice, Italy, 2013], you created environments around the movies, but for *Priority Innfield* am I right in thinking that the housing, seating, the films and the whole scenario, were all created around the same time?

Yeah, that was interesting because those pieces that house the movies were built simultaneous to the movies and with the same materials and with the same exact people who were making the movie set. We also built them on the computer as 3D models first which was not actually something we'd done before. It allows you to re-edit, re-insert or revise something again and creates this weird emptiness.

They are consequently very institutionalised spaces – bleak, tiled bathrooms [for the sculptural theatre subtitled *Pole*], municipal benches and rubbish bins [*Villa*] and sports hall bleachers surrounded by fences, chains and the like [*Fence* and *Tilt*]. Was there a preordained, frat-pack, *Blair Witch* theme for the look of *Priority Innfield*?

Ryan was really interested in these reality game shows, like *Killer Karaoke*, and we did get attached to this certain age group, of college kids, for *Priority Innfield*. Also many of the themes arose from engaging with the old footage Ryan shot in high school in Ohio. But since it all happened simultaneously, everything extends in every direction, I guess. That was the first time we were really starting to do this time-synced multiple-camera thing, so a lot of the scriptwriting became really structural, less about having a script in which this character says this or that and more about lines and ways of organising shoots and sets. We love fences and cages, that hasn't changed. I think we also pick those things because they're the types of objects that are meant to control people and they have this relationship to editing too, it's sort of like an affirming mechanism in some way – there is something liberating about compartmentalising.

Talking about these controlling mechanisms, do you think about how long an audience should stay in one place? There's that story about how McDonalds designs its furniture in a way that it's only comfortable to sit in for about ten minutes – so you eat your food and then leave. Do you want people to sit there a long time or do you want them to feel uncomfortable and move on?

My impulse about seating is usually to make it comfortable because there's enough material there that's uncomfortable in so many other ways. The thing about the movies is that we do think about them as a cyclical experience, you come back to them and you can leave – I don't ever want to tell people how long they need to stay in a space. I love it when people just breeze through and then come back or maybe they don't. And the headphones, that was always something that was really appealing to us to have the audio from the movie in the headphones because you can take it off and pause for a moment and think. That's something that I love about the sculptural theatre – it's a public viewing space but it doesn't have the rigidity of the theatre or cinema, where it's not cool to get up out of your seat ten minutes in because you're feeling nauseous.

There's a freedom and a restriction at the same time – you can get up and go or you can stay for hours.

Yeah and it's engaging and it's full. We make work for all these formats. We want to show in theatres, in sculptural theatres and we want them online. We'd never prioritise one. The sculptural theatres have a social element to them too and you really get to be inside them in a way the other viewing experiences haven't been able to do, and that's important to us.

I was watching some of the earlier movies and, as you said before, they're all set in more-or-less domestic spaces. There's a line in one of them in which one of the girls says: "I'm starting to not trust the house" and it felt like you were leaving the domestic space too. Have you started to hire spaces and build sets in a way that you hadn't before? Our studio is a warehouse in an area of the city where people make sets for movies. They often find it hard to grasp that we want our sets to be 360 [degrees]. We shoot everywhere – from the front, the back, the sides – even if there is a "behind-the-scenes" we'll go there. We've always structured our shooting in that way – get a house and then every part of that house becomes that set. So we pushed that, but also we were thinking about the physical relationship to 3D spaces that you can construct on a computer and how that is changing the way we think about space in general. We've worked with Rhett LaRue for a very long-time on models and animations and I think that working with him has influenced this thinking a lot.

The credits are complicated, right? Even in this show there is a new film of credits [*Priority Innfield (Credits)*, 2014] but they are hard to read and they're rolling and being animated. For instance, are there discrete Lizzie Fitch sculptures – the anthropomorphic furniture with legs and masks and so on – that appear in the movies?

Yes, that was true in the older movies, but now with these large-scale sets and freestanding sculptural theatres we don't rely on any of the existing architecture and so the whole thing becomes blurrier. At this point, I don't even know what is a sculpture

or a prop or a set anymore. Before they make it out there, they could be anything. We don't say "this is a sculpture and we're not going to touch it", but that has also changed for us because we were more compartmentalised before and now we're less so.

We reuse a lot of stuff and think of things as having more than one life. We engage whatever we want to serve our purposes. But there's always this part of us that wants to make something that's new, to create a different world.

I like this idea that a lot of it appears flat-pack new; everything has this sheen. Is that important – this ready-made, shop-bought aesthetic – rather than a handcrafted look? Yes, I think that is, because for us it feels like an animation – like digital units in a programme. But there are also moments when we like the handmade. I think with *Priority Innfield* we stayed away from that very purposely except for a few given moments with hand-smeared paint for instance, I think in *Junior War*, or body paint in *CENTER JENNY*.

Do you feel as if your practices are becoming, not just more collaborative, but that there's fewer boundaries to who does what?

Our creative relationship has changed a lot – it's evolving, we've gotten better at knowing what we do best alone and at the same time we explore things together that we didn't use to share. We still have a game plan, but there's more trust and also we just know each other so much better so we don't worry about the specifics as much. I'd say we have fewer boundaries, but reflecting on it we never had that many to begin with. It's just become overall deeper.

EXPERIMENTAL PEOPLE

The exuberant world of a video-art visionary.

BY CALVIN TOMKINS

Video art was invented in the mid-nineteen-sixties by a slightly mad, Korean-born genius named Nam June Paik, and in spite of the oceanic flood of video artists that his discovery unleashed, for the longest time I was convinced that no one had come close to improving on Paik's mastery of the form. I'm no longer convinced. About a year ago, I started

mer had their New York premiere on December 11th, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and the event was sold out. I got there early, and watched the two-hundred-and-seventy-two-seat theatre fill up with excited young people in groups of three or more, many of them dressed in jeans and hoodies. They cheered and whooped and whistled

fifteen years ago, when he was a high-school senior in Ohio, but not edited until last year. It showed a lot of blond, angelic-looking Midwestern boys and girls getting drunk, passing out, smashing mailboxes, tossing TV sets out the windows of speeding cars, setting small fires, and revelling in the annual rites of destruction that highlight autumn homecoming week in Whitehouse, Ohio. What struck me right away was how closely this early footage predicted Trecartin's future work. The chaotic energy, the virtuoso use of handheld camera techniques, the breaking of rules, and the theme of young people trying out different identities were all on display, although most of the time it was difficult to follow what the kids were saying,



Ryan Trecartin initially assumed that his videos might appear at film festivals: "I didn't even know that museums showed films."

looking at the work that Ryan Trecartin and his loosely associated group of fellow artists and performers have produced during the past decade. Not even Paik, I decided, made videos that are as consistently non-boring as these, or as full of breaking news about the future.

Four new works that Trecartin showed at the Venice Biennale last sum-

mer when Trecartin, who is thirty-three but looks ten years younger, was brought onstage before the screening. "Hi, guys," he said, grinning broadly, and then, with an awkward wave before exiting, "I hope you like them."

The first video (Trecartin prefers to call them movies) was "Junior War," twenty-four minutes of footage shot

The three other videos—"Comma Boat," "Center Jenny," and "Item Falls"—were technically more sophisticated and a good deal more complex in structure than "Junior War." In "Center Jenny," whose running time is fifty-three minutes, Trecartin's repertory troupe is augmented by a few professional actresses. Many are named Jenny in the

film, and they are trying to emulate an archetypal Jenny who has evolved to a higher level of existence. A profusion of events and social interactions unfold, sometimes in split screens. Fragments of disjointed dialogue catch your ear (“We’ve got to learn to walk backward if we’re going to fly”), but there is no sense of a coherent narrative. “My parents owned and funded the war,” one girl announces, convincingly. “This fucking donkeybutt is dating my dad, and I can’t fucking take it anymore,” another says.

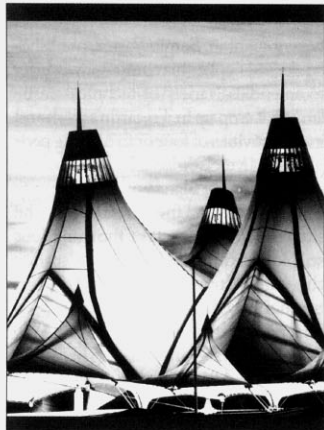
Trecartin himself, whose androgynous intensity usually makes him the most vivid presence in his films, is less visible in this one. The action is propelled by characters making loopy declarative statements about themselves, as young people tend to do, and doing inexplicable things, such as smashing fake concrete blocks with their bare hands, and, for reasons that are not entirely clear to me, my attention never flagged for the entire fifty-three minutes. It was caught and held by the shifting kaleidoscope of color-besotted images and animations, the cocksure pace and rhythm of the editing, and the spectacle of past and present collapsing into a wilderness of digital all-at-once.

Reviews of Trecartin’s videos often verge on the ecstatic. The *Times* critic Roberta Smith described him, in 2011, as “an immense but not fully developed talent that seems bound for greatness.” Peter Schjeldahl, of this magazine, called him “the most consequential artist to have emerged since the nineteen-eighties.” Massimiliano Gioni, the chief curator and the associate director of the New Museum, told me recently that Trecartin’s 2007 video “I-Be Area” was one of the inspirations for his “Younger Than Jesus” exhibition, in 2009. (It was a group show of artists born around 1980, making them younger than Jesus was when he died.) Although Gioni is only seven years older than Trecartin, the work opened up a world he knew nothing about. “It was like a cultural watershed,” he said. “I felt this was the voice of a different age and a different time, a different sexuality, a different kind of behavior. There’s this idea that a character can be many people at the same time. And the act of communication becomes the subject of his videos. We’re all trying to communicate, and

what we communicate about is less and less relevant. When I watch his videos, I feel a speeded-up version of what we’re all doing.”

Trecartin came of age when new technologies were changing the way we look at moving images—from the big screen to laptops and iPhones, from network to cable and broadband streaming—and the Internet was messing with our brains. He sees himself as a “bridge” person, someone who grew up before the revolution in digital technology, whose effects are now second nature to the generation that was born into it. His work is not about technology or social media, he has said, but about how the Internet changes the way we relate to the world and to one another, and his videos are rooted in the very world these changes have brought about. It is a place of multiple individual narratives unfolding simultaneously, of shifting identities and genders, of triumphant consumerism, and of young people yacking maniacally into cell phones, breaking windows and furniture, and saying things like “The world ended three weeks ago, starting now,” or “I exist because of Command V.... Don’t ignore ignore ignore me me me me.” Everybody in Trecartin’s work overcommunicates, Gioni observed, and the message is almost always about the self—a melodrama of solipsism, with occasional references to larger, public events whose reality is peripheral or fantastical. (“Reality, in Trecartin’s multi-racial social bubble, derives from personality assertion,” as Wayne Koestenbaum wrote in *Artforum*.) This may sound ludicrously self-indulgent, but by some alchemy of language, technical virtuosity, and visual seduction Trecartin makes it seem compelling and hugely enjoyable. He is one of the few artists of the postmodern era who are not opposed to pleasure. He once said, “My satisfaction comes—at least in part—from giving people what they want.”

Trecartin, his close friend and collaborator Lizzie Fitch, and several other co-workers have been based, since the end of 2010, in a Spanish-style house in the Los Feliz section of Los Angeles. The house has seen better days, but its eccentric shabbiness suits the group’s raffish life style and intensive work habits. Fitch does much of the cooking, and



Vision



Horst Berger
—a master of structural design—
helped create a fabric roof for the Denver

Airport that mirrors the snow-covered Rocky Mountains. Now, as a resident at Kendal on Hudson, he is lending his talents to their Health Center redesign initiative. Kendal strives to create an environment where you can continue to enrich your life and the lives of others.

Whether you’re looking for the intellectual and cultural stimulation of a college town or a big city, Kendal has a community for you.

DiscoverKendal.org
1.877.892.7037

KENDAL®

Together, transforming the experience of aging.®



Not-for-Profit Communities and Services for Older Adults in the Quaker tradition.

©2014 KENDAL

her companion, Sergio Pastor, publishes books and applies his computer wizardry to an endless variety of technical problems that crop up in Trecartin's work and in the activities of four or five young people who live elsewhere but have computer stations in a large, otherwise empty common room on the ground floor. The sitting room to the left of the front door still looks the way it did as a set for the video "Item Falls"—

turquoise walls and four queen-size beds side by side, facing a giant flat-screen TV. Alison Powell, a rather shy African-American woman who has been a regular performer in Trecartin's videos since they were both undergraduates at the Rhode Island School of Design, lives in a separate apartment below the office space. Anthony Valdez, whom Trecartin has been dating since 2012, was in New York when I visited, working on a project with a group from the online magazine *dis*, whose investigations of future trends in fashion, retailing, and art have often included Trecartin's active participation. Three cats have the run of the house, and a dozen or more chickens occupy a coop in the front yard and provide eggs for breakfast; they evolved from three chicks that appear in "Item Falls."

Trecartin, an exuberantly alert young man, wearing cut-off jeans, sneakers, and a bleached T-shirt, led me up a winding staircase to the second floor. We passed through his bedroom—a windowless cave with drifts of discarded clothes underfoot and several bookshelves full of vitamins and health supplements—and into the darkened editing room, where he not infrequently spends eighteen-hour stretches working at one or more of his three desktop computers. Apart from a long table against the opposite wall, some plastic crates full of files, and three office chairs on rollers, there was no furniture. Black plastic bags were taped to the windows in lieu of shades; he removed one of them to admit some daylight. A ceiling light kept going off and on, unnoticed by Trecartin as he sat in an office chair with one leg tucked under him, taking swigs from a bottle of kombucha and talking a blue streak. His voice is deep and resonant—

surprisingly, considering his slight frame and ingenuous, newly hatched look. He laughs a lot (his e-mails teem with "lol's"), and he speaks with what one of his friends calls "extreme confidence and very little arrogance."

When I asked him to explain the title of "I-Be Area," his video about adoption, cloning, shared identities, and other possible aspects of the new social order, he said that it came partly from his thinking about people having areas, which he described—I am paraphrasing—as the totality of each person's cumulative effect on others. "There is this character I-Be 2, whom I play, and he's a clone who's trying to find his independent identity. The basic idea of the film

is that what identifies people is not necessarily their bodies anymore; it's all the relationships they maintain with others. You are your area, rather than you are yourself. If someone describes you, that description becomes a part of your area, whether you like it or not." He paused, and said, doubtfully, "Is that clear?"

Trecartin's area has many layers, one of which is that he appears to have had an uncommonly happy childhood. He and his brother, Adam, who is two and a half years younger, spent their earliest years in Texas, in a suburb of Houston. Their father, Burdell (Dell), worked in various divisions of the steel industry, and in 1985, when Ryan was four, they moved to Massillon, Ohio, where Dell had taken a new job. "My dad is an extremely creative person who doesn't know he's creative," Trecartin told me. "He left work at work, so I never really knew what he did. On the phone to someone at the plant, he'd sound so macho, but around us he wasn't like that at all. He never put pressure on me to do sports, although one year he did make me go out for baseball. It was kind of a joke—my brother was much better at stuff like that. Dad would say, 'You guys can go to the candy store if Ryan can catch two balls in a row,' and I never could." He rummaged through some boxes, and pulled out an old snapshot of himself at about five, with his face painted in lurid colors for Halloween. "My dad did that," he said. "When we

got older, all my school friends wanted to come to our house, because they liked my parents so much." His mother, Cathy, was a teacher who had switched to part-time private tutoring and substitute teaching so that she could stay at home with the boys. (She had trained at a Montessori school, and had a master's degree in early-childhood education.) "My mom was very psychological, and I like talking, so we got along really well," he said.

He was encouraged to repeat first grade, and he and Adam were thought to have learning disabilities at school, the result of what was probably a mild form of dyslexia (although it was never diagnosed as such). Being held back didn't bother Ryan at all. "I remember feeling so happy when my mom told me, because I always thought the grade below mine was special," he said. "It was the Class of 2000, and they got to do a lot of special things." As a child, Cathy recalls, Ryan was almost always excited about something he was doing. "He had a lot of friends, and he had what I want to call joyfulness, not that he couldn't be a pain in the butt sometimes." He had always loved to draw. He started piano lessons in first grade, and a year later, after his parents let him watch the movie "Dirty Dancing," he took dance lessons. His mother borrowed an early VHS camera from a friend, so that she could film his dance routines—improvised after watching performances on MTV—and also the skits that he made up and performed, with Adam and their friends, in the basement at home.

Cathy discovered a magnet school in Canton, Ohio, about fifteen miles away, which offered classes for students who were gifted in dance, drama, music, and art. Ryan applied, and was accepted. "It was one of those schools where you had to live in the township to attend, and so we moved there," Trecartin said. "My parents were always really supportive." (The school was for grades four through eight, and when Adam was old enough he went there, too.) For the last three years, Ryan concentrated on music and dance and then on drama and dance. "In drama class, I was told I overacted, so I rarely got parts," he said. "But I always got the dancing parts." He quit the dance classes after eighth grade, because some of the kids had started making fun



of him. "They were calling me a faggot," he said. By then, Ryan knew he was gay, but he hadn't told his parents. "I was afraid they'd be disappointed, and I was really scared about AIDS," he said. Deprived of dancing, he shifted his focus to music, and began playing in bands, and skateboarding. He also became a topflight snowboarder. He was always popular, never feeling like an outsider, and in eighth grade he was elected class president.

After Ryan spent a year at GlenOak High School, in Canton, his father's next job took the family to Whitehouse, Ohio, a farm town in the northwest corner of the state. Lisa Reyerse, who is now a senior graphic designer at the Toledo Museum of Art, told me about her first encounter with Ryan: "He was the new kid, and he was in a couple of my classes. One day in history class, I was turning in one of my exams, and Ryan grabbed me from behind, picked me up and cracked my back, took both my hands and cracked my knuckles, and then broke up laughing. That's how we met." They were such close friends in their junior and senior years that everyone—including, at times, Trecartin and Reyerse—assumed they were boyfriend and girlfriend. Reyerse said, "There was a lot of respect for Ryan at the school, just because he was so different, and he didn't really care what people thought. He wasn't interested in sports, but to be social he would go to the football games and the bonfires."

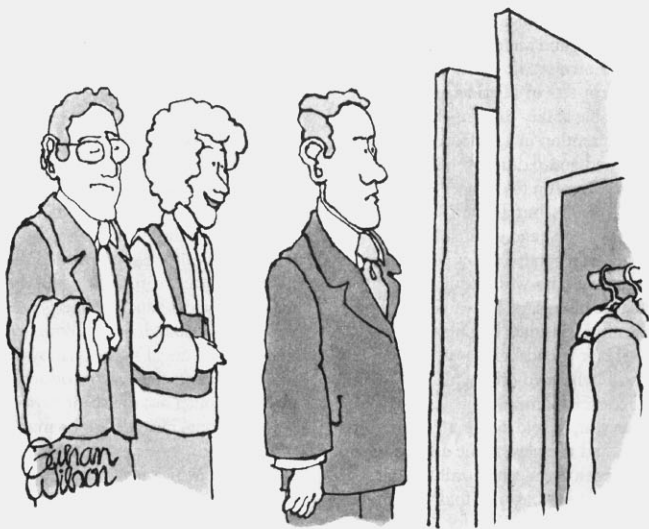
For Ryan's seventeenth birthday, his mother gave him a Sony Handycam, and in his senior year he began filming school events—among them the astonishing carnival known as the Senior-Junior Wars. (There had been nothing like this in the more citified schools he'd gone to before.) "The juniors and seniors would have this war, which lasted all week," Reyerse recalled. "When Ryan showed up with his video camera, it caused huge excitement." Trecartin had recently seen "The Blair Witch Project," and so had most of the other students. His Handycam had a night-vision lens, which allowed him to shoot after dark, when the misbehavior was at its height. "It looks so absurd now, but I made all these friendships that I probably never have made otherwise," he said. The gleeful vandalism in his high-school footage carries over into his early videos, where

young people trash rooms, break windows and walls and lamps and furniture, and set things on fire. When I asked him about this, he grinned and ducked his head. "Destruction is a creative act at that age," he said. "It's something I've done my whole life," he later added. "I don't know where it comes from, but I usually break more things when I'm happy."

There were no dance or music classes at the school in Whitehouse, but there was an art teacher named Sue Ladd, who loved Ryan's drawings and paintings, and told him that he should think about going to art school. In his senior year, he was allowed to take two photography courses at the University of Toledo, which was a thirty-minute drive from Whitehouse. (Trecartin had inherited the family's old Ford Tempo.) His teacher there showed him some photographs by Cindy Sherman, which were his first significant introduction to contemporary art. For his art classes, Trecartin also spent time at the Toledo Museum, but nothing there inspired him—he has never had much interest in museums, or in art history. By the time he graduated from high school, he had put together a portfolio of drawings, paintings, sculptures, and photographs, which got him into the Rhode Island School of Design.

Many art schools now favor a conceptual approach to art-making, encouraging students to figure out their own path through experimentation and a critical awareness of prevailing styles, but RISD adheres to an older tradition. The teaching is skill-oriented, and after a first-year foundation course students are expected to major in a specific area. Trecartin chose Film/Animation/Video. Very early in his sophomore year, he began working with Lizzie Fitch, a classmate who was in the painting department. Fitch had grown up in Oberlin, Ohio. A highly intelligent girl with short, permanently tousled blond hair, she read a lot (unlike Trecartin, whose knowledge of literature and art history comes mostly from talking with people like Fitch). Trecartin asked her to be in a video that he was making for a class assignment that involved continuity, and the result was "Kitchen Girl," a very short (just under three minutes), extremely funny, and somewhat disturbing vignette, in which Fitch, screaming her head off, yanks a baby stroller—filled with oddly shaped woollen objects that she had crocheted—up a flight of stairs and into a kitchen. Her screams are neither frightened nor crazed but triumphant.

Fitch was in most of his student videos after that. "My work at RISD was very



"Say something pompous!"

THE MILD MILD WEST



"This snakebite is hurtin' mighty bad, Annabelle—I'm thinkin' of utterin' a cussword."

unfocussed," she said, when I talked with her last fall. "I knew I didn't want to just be a painter. Because I was so interested in trying to locate what my work actually is, it was easier for me to work inside of his work, which is a really comfortable space for me to be." The paintings, drawings, and sculptures she was doing in her own studio often functioned as props or sets in his videos, and her remarkable ability to compel the viewer's rapt attention in a wide variety of roles inspired and fed his prolific inventiveness. Trecartin told me, "I need a lot of time alone, but I don't like making things alone," and in Fitch he found not just a collaborator and a performer but the partner his work required. Without her, he often says, he would never have been the artist he's become.

Their friendship was untroubled by sex. Fitch dated other guys, and so did Trecartin. Home for a break in his freshman year, he told his parents that he was gay, and the news came as a complete surprise to them. "It's horrible to say, but my heart sank," Cathy told me. "Part of it was that I was afraid for him. I wasn't upset with him, and neither was his father." Dell said, "I didn't understand it,

because he'd had girlfriends and all that. It took me a while, but today it doesn't mean a thing. There's been ten times more joy with Ryan's presence than any of that could ever affect." Ryan also told Lisa Reyerse, his high-school friend, who wasn't so surprised. "It made everything else make sense," she said. "But my mom cried when I told her. She really, really likes him, and she always thought we would be married."

In their junior year, Fitch, Trecartin, and five or six other students who had lived in the same dormitory as freshmen shared off-campus quarters in what became known as the Pink House. They started a band called Experimental People, later shortened to XPPL—Ryan played the keyboard and the bass guitar, made electronic sounds with a computer, and sometimes sang. Fitch was always in the thick of whatever was going on at the Pink House, but Trecartin spent most of his time working. He didn't drink much, he didn't do drugs—a bad experience with hallucinogenic mushrooms in high school had made him afraid to go near them—and he worked harder than anyone else. "Ryan was always so focussed on becoming an artist, and so certain it

was going to happen," Brian McKelligott, one of the Pink House fraternity, told me. "I don't think I've ever met anybody who was so determined."

He had no trouble getting people to appear in his videos. "It was always fun to be in Ryan's videos," Rhett LaRue, another Pink House resident, recalls. (He and Trecartin had come out at around the same time; LaRue is now the Trecartin group's go-to person for animation.) "He knew what he wanted, but he was always very flexible." Trecartin told the performers what to do and say. They all painted their faces in primary colors, and there was a lot of gender shifting, enhanced by wigs and exaggerated vamping.

Critics often assume that Trecartin's movies were influenced by Andy Warhol, John Waters, Paul McCarthy, or other anti-traditionalists. Trecartin, however, was simply following his own established methods. "When I was a kid, organizing scenarios and directing people to do things, I always thought of it as something I would film if I could," he told me. "My understanding of structuring a scene, of movement through space, of cutaways and perspective and all those things people do to create a sense of place—I absorbed them intuitively. And then when I started watching films with people who studied that stuff"—his teachers at RISD—"they would point things out to me and I would think, Yeah, I do that." He had watched a lot of TV when he was growing up—everything from "Pee-wee's Playhouse" to the latest music videos. He likes TV more than movies because its structure is episodic and open-ended. Certain aspects of the Broadway shows that his parents took him to see when they visited his grandparents in New Jersey made him cringe. "I hate the way people talk onstage," he said. "That affected way of projecting so people in the back rows can hear."

In his senior year at RISD, he stopped going to classes and worked exclusively on his thesis project, a forty-one-minute video called "A Family Finds Entertainment." All his friends were in it, along with about forty others, several of whom played multiple roles. There was a script, Trecartin's first really detailed one, which evolved and changed as the filming progressed. He didn't show the script to the

performers, or try to explain to them what he had in mind. Working with his actors one at a time, he would give them a line of dialogue—maybe just four or five words—and have them say it over and over. If an actor said something that Trecartin liked better, which “gave it a weird twist,” he would keep the change and write it into the script. He had already initiated the process, which he has continued ever since, of shooting at night and sleeping during the day. “There’s no light coming in the windows at night, and people have fewer distractions—they’re not checking their cell phones, and their associations are weirder at night, somehow,” he explained. “As a director, I ask a lot from people, and then I kind of let them take control of it. I yield a lot. I tell them very basic things, like what to do, and I work on their accent, but I also allow them to run with something if they need to.” Later, alone in the editing room, he shapes this raw material in ways that, as often as not, he had not anticipated. “A Family Finds Entertainment,” with its chaotic pace and energy, dizzying color palette, driving soundtrack of noise music and ambient noise, and fragmented collage of teen-age language patterns, gave viewers direct access to the hyperconnected, electronic souk of the millennial generation.

Some people thought the video was about Ryan coming out as a gay person, but he says no, it’s more like a coming-of-age story. Running through it is a vastly expanded notion of what “family” can mean to young people who live on the Internet and are free to assume various personalities at will. After a prologue involving a little girl (Trecartin’s cousin) and her grownup, imaginary companion (played by Trecartin), we are in a suburban living room, where four or five people are sitting around talking and occasionally calling out to their friend Skippy, who has locked himself in the bathroom. Cut to Skippy (Trecartin), in a tank top, his front teeth blackened. He’s holding a bread knife, looking in the bathroom mirror, and talking to the camera. (“I’m not sixteen anymore, but I feel like I’m five with sunglasses on.”) He cuts his arm with the knife, and fake blood pours out. The screen breaks up into multiple images—portraits and abstract patterns, revolving and zooming in and out. Later, unscathed and wearing a Hawaiian shirt,

Skippy enters a cluttered kitchen, where a skinny, fortyish woman tells him, “This family is poisonous. You need to find a new home.” Skippy turns and confides to the camera, “Mama is a snake, yes, she is.” Enter Billy (Kenny Curran), naked except for a flag around his shoulders; he has white lips and a blackened penis. After more conversation, Mama gives Skippy fifty dollars, embraces him, and says, “Get the fuck outta my house.” He goes downstairs and out the door, saying, “Yay-yuh, it’s a nice night out to die.” Outside, he meets a young woman named Zoe, who says she’s making a documentary on “medium-age kids all over the world.” Skippy runs out into the street and is hit by a car, which doesn’t stop. Zoe videotapes him lying in the street.

The narrative thread more or less disappears at this point, and the images get wilder and more frenetic. We’re in the Pink House, where Shin, a red-haired girl (Trecartin again) whose face is painted in a clownish mask of red, yellow, and blue patches, dominates the increasingly crowded premises. Closeups of performers, all of them singing, zoom in and out against chaotically colorful backgrounds—video paintings. Faces get doubled, fragmented, collaged. Fifteen versions of repeated images appear in grids. Then we are in a wildly decorated

room where more and more young people, wearing body paint, say things like “Identity failure,” “Gravity slave,” “Non-linear trash,” “Artificial intelligence,” and “Cosmic puke.” Bands hammer away in several rooms, and everybody dances. Out on the street, Skippy hears the music, revives, and goes to join the party. The revellers erupt into the street, and Shin, dancing in a child’s inflatable pool, ducks underwater and comes up without the wig or the face paint—she has merged with Skippy (I think). Fireworks fill the night sky. A title fills the screen: “Dedicated to My Mom and Dad.” The credits roll.

Cathy and Dell Trecartin travelled from Ohio for the film’s first public screening, at RISD, in the spring of 2004. “It just shocked me,” Dell said. His childhood friend Ken Johnson, an art critic for the *Times*, was there, along with Linda Norden, who, at the time, was a curator at the Fogg Museum, at Harvard, and would become one of Trecartin’s most effective supporters. After the screening, Dell took Johnson aside and asked him what he thought. “Ken said, ‘Listen, I have never seen anything like this. Leave him alone. It’s great.’” The film may be autobiographical in some ways, but the family in it is not Ryan’s. Cathy remembers seeing Ryan come into the bar they had gone to after the



screening, and thinking, It's all right. It's Ryan. Exhausted from his struggles with the final edit, Ryan spent the next three weeks in bed, recovering from a cold and a venomous-spider bite.

In the fall, Trecartin, Fitch, and most of the Pink House contingent moved to New Orleans. They rented a cheap house in the Ninth Ward, and got restaurant jobs that allowed time for their art work. Trecartin started a new video, and he and Fitch and the others made free-form sculptures. (Fitch had worked briefly for a Mardi Gras company, and learned a technique that involved using cardboard strips and contact cement to build figurative objects.) Trecartin, with a lot of help from his mother, was also burning DVDs of "A Family Finds Entertainment" and sending them to film festivals and college film societies. It was Cathy who told him about YouTube, which was just starting then; he posted "Family" on it some time later. The following August, Hurricane Katrina drove them all out of town. After three months in Oberlin, where Fitch's mother lived, they went to Los Angeles. Elizabeth Dee, a young New York art dealer, had arranged for them to have a group show at a gallery she co-owned there, called QED.

Dee had heard about Trecartin a few months earlier, from a curator at the New Museum named Rachel Greene, who learned about him from the artist Sue de Beer. Some students at the Cleveland Institute of Art had shown de Beer a DVD of "A Family Finds Entertainment," which she described to Greene as "incredibly hard-core," and Greene had tracked Trecartin down in New Orleans, through Friendster. After seeing the video, she invited him to New York, and introduced him to a number of curators and dealers, including Dee. "I can remember the temperature of the room when I watched the video," Dee said. "I was mesmerized, disturbed, and I just knew this was going to be huge." When Dee met Trecartin in New York, she recalls, "I said, 'Talk, tell me everything—where is this coming from?' He was so young and boylike and enthusiastic and positive. The core of his work is language, the experimental language that comes from an intuitive place, but this was combined with a complete lack of regard for the theoretical attitudes of conceptual art."

The show that Dee organized, called "I Smell Pregnant," opened at QED in January, 2006, and nearly everything was sold—around forty sculptures and the entire edition of "A Family Finds Entertainment," eight videos plus one of the artist's proofs at four thousand dollars apiece. Trecartin was mortified, because some sculptures by other members of the group were accidentally attributed to him. "That was extremely upsetting," he told me. "We got it corrected, and in the end it was probably a good thing, because it made us deal with the whole problem of giving credit. With the movies, I am the author. I write the script, although everyone influences it, and I direct, and then I edit, and they're all comfortable with that." The sculptures that he and Fitch make together—humanoid forms juxtaposed with manufactured objects—are signed "Fitch/Trecartin"; the others are credited to their makers, all of whom have their own independent practices, and everyone gets listed in the movie credits. In a piece for *Artforum* that came out in the same month as the QED show, Dennis Cooper concluded, "It's early yet, but the great excitement of Trecartin's work is that it honestly does seem to have come from out of nowhere."

Christie Iles and Philippe Vergne decided to include "A Family Finds Entertainment" in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, which they were co-curating. "You know how it is when you feel a page turning," Iles said, last fall. "What struck me about



the work is that it marked a shift away from television as we knew it. Because of the Internet, television was becoming something else. Ryan emerged at the beginning of the Internet's involvement with the art world, and his work has a visual richness that really engages your eye. He was also coming out of something we addressed in the 2004 Biennial, which was the queer voice—gay male artists who were making that important in their work." It had only recently dawned on

Trecartin that the art world might be interested in his videos; he had assumed that they might appear at film festivals or art-house theatres. "I didn't even know museums showed films," he admitted. "The art world attached itself at just the right moment, because there was no way I could have had the freedom to do this anywhere else."

The videos he has done since 2006 build on the innovations of "A Family Finds Entertainment" and "I-Be Area," his much longer 2007 film (an hour and forty-two minutes), in increasingly complex and original ways. The "Any Ever" series (2009-11), seven separate but connected videos whose combined running time is three hours and fifty-five minutes, moves beyond the domestic sphere and makes frequent references to the recession, global corporate careerism, office life, and the "branding" of personalities and products. "I would like to Re-Brand, Re-Organize, and Internationalize the entire 'Communications War,' so that, in effect, we are on all sides," a character in "K-Core/INC.K" says. "Roamie View," another in the "Any Ever" series, closes with one of Trecartin's more openly poetic fancies:

Well, if I is you and is all and personal now
I have a news flash for you.
Everyone shares a Katie.
You're not the only sky to touch that star.

Except for "Junior War," the videos he showed in Venice last summer are paced more slowly than those in the "Any Ever" series, and it's somewhat easier to follow the dialogue. People tend to stay the same gender throughout, and to talk to each other, rather than to the camera. In "Comma Boat," a frenetic Trecartin, his face stained green and purple, plays the part of a "director," harassing the players in a parody of his own, much calmer directorial style. He and the other characters seem like tentative adults, reaching out to lives that might extend beyond the self, or selves.

The Trecartin ménage has moved several times in the past few years: to Philadelphia, where "I-Be Area" was made; to Miami, for the shooting of "Any Ever"; and then to Los Angeles, at the end of 2010. "I've never wanted to live in New York," Trecartin told me. "I feel it's a place where ideas are brought to

be shown and judged, and I don't think I could work there." His associates have always had other jobs to support themselves, but, now that more money is coming in, three new studio employees receive salaries paid by Fitch Trecartin Studio, a corporate entity founded in 2011. A few new people have come on board. Telfar Clemens, an African-American clothing designer who was born in LeFrak City, Queens, went to Philadelphia with some friends in 2006 and found himself playing several key parts in "I-Be Area." He told me, "I was twenty at the time, and I had no clue what the movie was about, but there was a lot of pizza and whiskey on the set." Clemens had an unpredictable charisma that Trecartin spotted immediately. "He'll never say a line the way I've given it to him, but what comes out of his mouth is way better," Trecartin said. Kevin McGarry, who studied filmmaking at N.Y.U. and, later, as a member of the selection committee for the New York Underground Film Festival, argued successfully for putting "A Family Finds Entertainment" in the 2005 festival, moved to Philadelphia in 2009, and became a close friend of the group's. Now a freelance writer, McGarry has written synopses of Trecartin's videos, and helps him answer people who ask for written statements about his work.

Trecartin ended his relationship with Elizabeth Dee in 2011. The break came with a lot of pain on both sides. Dee's passionate belief in him and his work had been a crucial element in getting it produced and shown, and their association had worked well for seven years. She had raised money for production costs, persuading several collectors to commit to the "Any Ever" films sight unseen, in exchange for discounts on the finished work. Dee had no objection to Trecartin's keeping his videos on YouTube or Vimeo—she recognized that his work was "conceptually native to online," and should be available to a wide public as well as to curators and collectors.

The edition of eight "I-Be Area" videos and one artist's proof sold out very quickly, for between twenty thousand and twenty-five thousand dollars apiece. The film had ended up costing more than a hundred thousand dollars, though, and Trecartin had maxed out



several credit cards and borrowed money from his parents, who took out a line of credit on their house to come up with it. (They were also paying off some of his college loans.) With "Any Ever," which Dee co-produced, the costs rose exponentially. Trecartin and Fitch started building sculptural environments in which to show the videos, spaces furnished with lamps, bureaus, and other items that they bought at Target or IKEA. Dee was able to sell most of these (environment plus video for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars; single videos from forty-five thousand to sixty-five thousand dollars). This and two grants from private foundations enabled Trecartin to pay his parents back in full for the line of credit they had taken out. Dee brought in crucial support from two German collectors when the post-2008 recession made funding harder to find, and in 2010 and 2011 she put together a five-museum tour of the "Any Ever" material, with important stops at MOMA PS1, in Queens, and the Musée d'Art Moderne, in Paris. Tensions had been building in Trecartin and Fitch's relationship with Dee, however, and soon after the "Any Ever" museum tour they reached an impasse.

Trecartin and Fitch had learned a lot more by this time about the art world and the artist-dealer relationship. Although Trecartin comes across to ev-

eryone as sweet and a little naïve, he has always been uncompromising where his work is concerned, and he and Fitch wanted to have a larger share in the over-all decision-making. Dee, they felt, either couldn't or wouldn't deal with this. "Once we started trying to have a different relationship with her, things got really messy," Trecartin said. Dee was shattered by the break. "I would have collaborated in any form that Ryan desired," she said. "It's very hard to watch an artist as talented as he is grow up in public." For a year after the association dissolved, Trecartin and Fitch chose to have no primary gallery. They are now represented in this country by two well-established dealers, Andrea Rosen Gallery, in New York, and Regen Projects, in Los Angeles. Working together, the Rosen and Regen galleries raised the money up front for Trecartin and Fitch to make and install the four new videos that premiered at the Venice Biennale, and they have been, as Trecartin put it, "so generous about cleaning up our messes."

The Venice videos were shown as sculptural theatre at the Arsenal, a mediaeval network of shipyards that serve as one of the main venues for the show, in spaces made for them by Trecartin and Fitch. I'm not convinced that the installations enhance the viewing experience, or that the "sculptural" elements are



Kanin

"How much are we supposed to tip the guy who followed us to our room and flicked the light switch?"

really sculpture—to me, they seem more like props. Many viewers wander in and out of them, staying for only a few minutes. Massimiliano Gioni, of the New Museum, who served as the director of the 2013 Biennale, nevertheless assured me that “the number of people who spent time with those pieces in Venice was amazing. They just sat there with headphones on.” Lauren Cornell, a curator at the New Museum, values Trecartin’s sense of the new cultural climate so highly that she asked him to co-curate the New Museum’s next big triennial exhibition, which opens in February, 2015. “Ryan is an incredibly keen listener and observer,” Cornell told me. “So much of his work comes from his intense attention to people—how they act and operate.”

When I checked in with Trecartin in Los Angeles last month, he and Fitch were shooting a new movie in what used to be a Masonic temple, on Wilshire Boulevard. “Do you know Maurice Marciano?” he asked, referring to one of the founders of Guess jeans, who bought the building with his brother Paul last year. “The temple has been abandoned since the nineteen-nineties, and he’s going to gut the whole thing and turn it into a private museum. He said we could break

whatever we want in there.” Most of the familiar faces in Trecartin’s extended family appear in the new film. He’s also using some parkour athletes, “to jump from high places and do splits and stuff.” Trecartin got interested in stunts when they were making “Any Ever.” He works with parkour people because they’re not professional stunt artists, and are willing to collaborate on ideas.

Trecartin and Fitch had planned to show several new, post-Venice videos this fall, in Los Angeles, New York, and Berlin, but at this point nothing is certain. The Masonic-temple movie, which won’t have anything to do with Masonic rites or symbols, is turning into a major work. It will include new footage shot last summer at a lake house in Minnesota that Rhett LaRue’s grandfather owns, and the story in the temple itself will reflect Trecartin’s recent research and thinking about zombies—beings “who foreshadow certain inevitable things, like life extension, and our past being reanimated,” Trecartin informed me. His current body of work, which began with the four Venice films, may not be completed for some time.

Trecartin talks of moving to Mexico City next year. The group has never done two big projects in the same place,

and a new location stimulates fresh thinking. He is aware of the dangers that early success can bring. Almost everything that he and Lizzie Fitch earn goes back into their work, and they are determined not to be constrained by market pressures. “We’re deliberately abandoning things we planned to do, in order to explore new things,” he said. Fitch, who continues to work on and act in their movies, co-manage the over-all operation, and sell her own sculptures, has become increasingly involved in their joint creative process. She sometimes handles the camera when Trecartin is acting, and she co-edited “Comma Boat” when they were struggling to finish it in time for the Biennale. There are limits, though, to Trecartin’s willingness to share control. “I found out that, if I’m not writing and editing, I’m not doing my work,” he told me. “I just love editing, and I want to do it alone.” He can see them eventually working together on a Fitch-Trecartin production, but what’s more likely, he said, is that he’ll help Fitch make her own movie. They still discuss everything, and argue heatedly over decisions, such as whether a scene works. I asked Fitch who usually wins their arguments. “We both win,” she said, beaming. “That’s the best part. He’s really my closest friend.”

Trecartin wants to make another movie from the thirty reels of his high-school videos. “I think the new work really came out of the high-school movie, because it made me realize I had a past—I didn’t even know I had one until then,” he said. His default mode is still the future, though, and his main preoccupation is still with the ways technology has changed and is changing us. He said, “Everything we do is going to be captured and archived in an accessible form, whether you want it or not. It’s going to change all of our lives. We are a species that can no longer assume a sense of privacy. It’s not an individual decision, and I feel that’s exciting to explore—or something. There’s a lot of cultural content being generated right now that sees itself as post-human, but it’s assuming the twentieth century as its audience. It leans on structures that we already understand, but that we’re moving away from. My work is about humanity, and about the time I’m making it.” ♦



Ryan Trecartin & Lizzie Fitch
KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin

By TRAVIS JEPPESEN, NOV. 2014

Site Visit is the name of Lizzie Fitch and Ryan Trecartin's recent exhibition in Berlin. The show is divided into two parts: sound and video, (Though the video part also includes sound, naturally.) The sound installation is in a green carpeted foyer area leading in to the video installation. It consists of rows of electric leather arm chairs that allow you to adjust your seating position into a laying one via an array of buttons, which also make the chairs rumble and vibrate, like those old motel beds that took a quarter. Rumble and vibrate to the rumbles and vibrations of the music being blasted quite loud by the surrounding speakers – discordant bass rhythms. Less composed music, it's more like mutant alien ghetto blaster sonicscapes. Very shit-your-pants rumbly, and with green martian lights beneath each of the armchairs shining out, turning the floor into a production.

Vibrato as a lifestyle choice. The aliens live in each of us. You remove your ass from your armchair and make your way into the video room. Along the way, further layer of sounds are discovered: before you make your way down the stairs, you are further blasted with more speakers, silver plattering out a thin slice of fuzzy and distorted beach sounds. Moving past, you reach the apex, the video room with six screens and seats aimed in all directions, including the ceiling, where one of the screens can be found.

Filmed in a former Masonic temple in Los Angeles, the video work features Trecartin and Fitch's regular ensemble, who will be familiar to anyone who has seen the duo's past efforts like I-BE Area or Center Jenny. The essentially cultic nature of the artist's productions makes total sense transferred to the abandoned shell of the freemasons' headquarters. Impossible, like their earlier work, to summarize, the impression one gets is of a group trapped in a cross between a reality TV show—this time, something like Ghost Hunters—and a Blair Witch-style horror flick, yet with the cameras moving too fast, the caricatures each person inhabits speaking too fast and egomaniacally to bother with the making of sense. Nonetheless, given the maximalist intensity and the all-overness of the installation's presentation, you can readily lose yourself in it for an hour or more. For those following the path, it is a pivotal stop on Fitch and Trecartin's ongoing exploration of presence in the digital age. WM

FINANCIAL TIMES

October 28, 2014

Post-internet art in London

Griselda Murray Brow

Three solo shows paint a troubling picture of the way technology is changing our lives



A still from Ryan Trecartin's film, 'Center Jenny'

There's a scene in the pilot of Lena Dunham's HBO series *Girls* in which the 24-year-old Hannah (played by Dunham) tries to persuade her parents not to end her allowance, which she needs in order to finish writing her book. "I think that I may be the voice of my generation," she reasons. "Or at least a voice . . . of a generation."

The idea that one voice might define a generation is plainly ridiculous. Yet the desire for such a voice, from both the marketers and consumers of popular culture, is undeniable. Indeed Hannah's plea is often used to describe Dunham's own achievement, with her hit show about twentysomethings in an era of interns and Instagram.

So who is Dunham's equivalent in the slippery world of contemporary art? Gallery types talk excitedly of "post-internet art", a term that refers broadly to art made by those who

have grown up with the internet and which reflects the cultural changes it has wrought. The curators Hans Ulrich Obrist and Simon Castets are even putting together a database of such artists as part of the 89plus.com project (the artists were all born in or after 1989, the year the world wide web was launched). Three solo shows by artists too old for Obrist but otherwise firmly labelled “post-net” are currently on in London, and together they paint a troubling picture of the ways technology is changing life today.

Video artist Ryan Trecartin, born in Texas in 1981, has enjoyed critical attention since graduating from art school. Indeed, sometimes the attention has bordered on adoration: The New Yorker has hailed him as “the most consequential artist to have emerged since the 1980s”. His film series *Priority Innfield* was a hit at the Venice Biennale last year and is now at London’s Zabludowicz Collection – its production having been part funded by collector Anita Zabludowicz, who effectively pre-purchased it.

The main gallery is boxed in to create a dark, disorientating space with two “sculptural theatres” designed by Trecartin and his longtime collaborator Lizzie Fitch. The first film, “Item Falls”, introduces the young hopefuls auditioning for a “gaming system that is also a university” with the aim of becoming boy band members or animated girls called “Jennys”. The second film, “Center Jenny”, sees the girls, now a kind of sorority, progress through the levels of the game spouting bitchy insults as they go.

But to describe the plot of a Trecartin film is to miss the point. Fragmented and frenzied, they are more like character studies than stories: *Priority Innfield* explores how identity is shaped by the internet and modern celebrity. “I deserve a solo,” screams one character. “I have 4,000 friends,” another says. “One of the most elegant things about facts is that I believe in them,” announces a third. These are people who look at the camera more than each other and talk in rehearsed soundbites. Like the YouTube hopefuls singing into webcams in bedrooms across the world, Trecartin’s characters are obsessed with the idea of auditioning, of being chosen.

The films mix handheld camerawork with CGI to suggest a hyperreality. The editing is fast, the light saturated and the actors’ voices high-pitched. Everything is carefully choreographed to create an orgiastic chaos. Characters change gender and skin colour: identity is fluid, constructed. “I fucking make up shit, OK? And that’s my gimmick,” one Jenny snaps at another. In this competitive, computer-game reality, everyone must have a gimmick, a USP.

Trecartin’s vision may sound exaggerated; certainly, a world populated by his shrieking narcissists would be unbearable. But the next film, “Junior War”, which he shot at high school in the late 1990s, shows how much our relationship to the camera has changed. “Don’t film me!” one girl recoils. “He’s videotaping us,” another warns her friend. *Priority Innfield* is Trecartin’s warning: this is what the internet has done to us. Beneath the lurid unreality of his films is a truth that’s hard to dismiss.

Ed Fornieles’ one-room installation at the Chisenhale gallery, *Modern Family*, could pass for an abandoned set in a messy Trecartin movie. Here are the trappings of family

life – garden furniture, picnic food, toys – but without the family. Like the deck chair encrusted with breakfast cereal, everything is strange, overloaded, sickly sweet. The accompanying notes describe the scene as a “Pinterest reality” – hundreds of objects and references ripped from their origins and artfully arranged to express something of the character of their arranger. The soundtrack is a similar mash-up – *Swan Lake*, funk, Disney. We are all curators now, Fornieles seems to say. But there is a clichéd quality to it all, and the words “Be Yourself” cut out of a bland two-tone painting suggest a cookie-cutter conformity to the way we attempt uniqueness through social media. That is true enough, but there is nothing here as genuinely disturbing as Trecartin’s films.

At the Institute of Contemporary Arts, 29-year-old French artist Neil Beloufa also brings together diverse imagery, but his work has less of the one-liner about it than Fornieles’. His assemblage sculptures owe much to cubist collage and the likes of Robert Rauschenberg, but their trashiness – flimsy plastic, cheap electronics – feels contemporary. Beloufa draws attention to the making, and faking, of art: you can see how some sculptures have been tacked together; others incorporate the cigarettes he smoked in the studio while producing them. Art’s pretensions to be more than it is – to comprise objects so immaculate that the messy processes of manufacture are concealed – are the kind of lie Beloufa sees everywhere in contemporary life: from reality TV, where ordinary people are blown up into “personalities”, to the sleek design of corporate modernism (he has installed his own scrappy, colourful CCTV cameras next to each of the ICA’s real ones, rendering them strangely po-faced).

Beloufa made his name with documentary-style films that muddy fact with fiction. For a new video “Data for Desire” he asked a group of elite teenage mathematicians from France to analyse a film he’d shot of Americans the same age at a party, tasking the French teens with creating an algorithm to predict who would couple up at the party. The absorbing result cuts between the two groups, teasing out cultural preconceptions and pointing to the absurd faith our society puts in technology and data.

Questions of authority and authenticity run through Beloufa’s work. For another film, “World Domination”, he asked non-actors to play world leaders at a summit, asking each to declare war on another country, without giving them a script. “People act so well naturally,” Beloufa explains, when we meet in the gallery. “If you base your culture on selling, you have people that know how to do it: actors are sellers.” Like Trecartin and Fornieles, he is interested in the elision of real and virtual life. The idea of the “selfie”, so central to their art, encapsulates both the technology and “me culture” of the post-internet age.

‘Lizzie Fitch/Ryan Trecartin’, Zabludowicz Collection, London, to December 21, zabludowiczcollection.com

‘Ed Fornieles: Modern Family’, Chisenhale, London, to November 9, chisenhale.org.uk

‘Neil Beloufa: Counting on People’, ICA, London, to November 16, ica.org.uk

ISSN 0394-1493



POSTE ITALIANE SPA - Sped. in
A. P. - D.L. 353/2003 (conv. in
L. 27/02/2004 n° 46) art. 1,
comma 1 / PE / Aut. N.164 / 2008

Flash Art

THE WORLD'S LEADING ART MAGAZINE • INTERNATIONAL EDITION

no. 295

Volume 47 - 2014
March - April

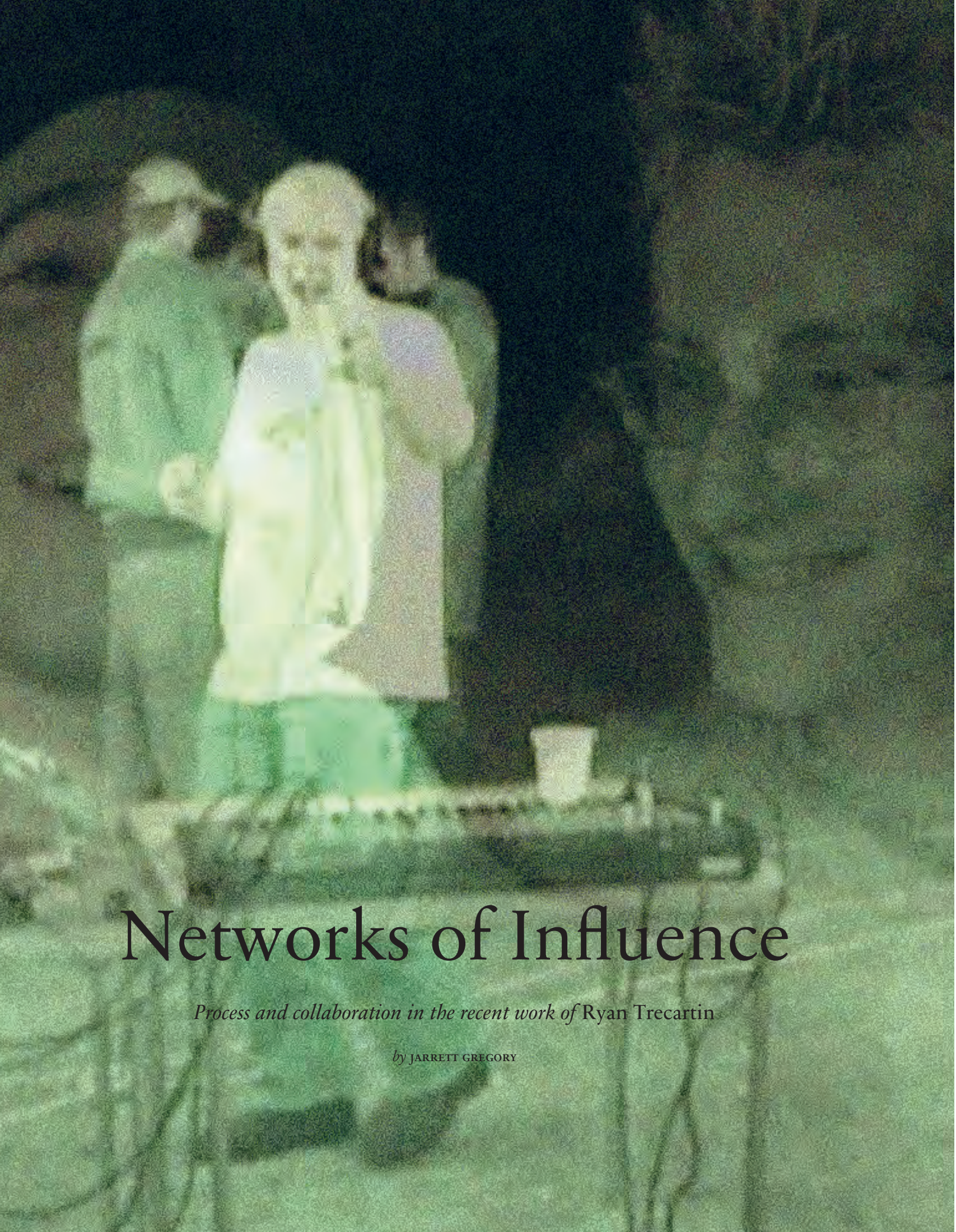
US \$ 14.95 - Italy € 8.50
Belgium € 11.90 - Spain € 15.00
Portugal € 14.50 - UK £ 6.50
Germany € 9.90



INDEX *magazine*

*Peter Halley on INDEX magazine / DAVID DOUARD / Spike Jonze's Her / LUTZ BACHER /
PETER SCHUYFF / RYAN TRECARTIN*

plus Speculation on Anonymous Materials / Jeffrey Deitch / Hood By Air / Philipp Timischl



Networks of Influence

Process and collaboration in the recent work of Ryan Trecartin

by JARRETT GREGORY



“We are really walking a fine line — in fact, our line might be so fine that we might be seen as failing.”
— Director, *Comma Boat*, 2013

Across Ryan Trecartin’s relatively brief career, his name has become synonymous with a changing tide that hinges around technology — its use, dissemination and continuing impact. He first became the subject of critical attention when his senior thesis movie for RISD, *A Family Finds Entertainment* (2004), was included in the Whitney Biennial in 2006. The movie debuted on a small monitor next to the second-floor elevators, but despite its modest presentation it made a significant impact. On first glance it might have appeared banal or even obnoxious — a group of kids playing with a video camera at a fever pitch — but in Trojan Horse-fashion it unearthed more than could have been anticipated. Trecartin’s raw talent was striking, and his performance as the tortured and narcissistic musician Skippy — who locks himself in a bathroom and takes the present-day equivalent of “selfies” with a Polaroid camera before he slits his wrists in a joyful bloodbath — yielded several unforgettable scenes. The piece carried a genuine and undeniable sense of urgency; although it was distinctly rooted in the present moment, its chaotic murmurings threatened to prophesy the future of not only art but life as well.

It was ten years ago that the twenty-three year old student wrapped *A Family Finds Entertainment*, and since then a lot has changed and a lot has stayed the same. Working consistently with his partner-in-art Lizzie Fitch, Trecartin has become increasingly visible, featured predominantly in museum and institutional presentations, and was the subject of a major monographic exhibition, “Any Ever,” which traveled from MOCA Los Angeles to MoMA PS1 in New York in 2011. His most recent works debuted in 2013 at the 55th Venice Biennale in Massimiliano Gioni’s exhibition “The Encyclopedic Palace.” Continuing to address language and the construction of identity, the new movies significantly advance the ideas that Trecartin has been playing with since 2004, while stylistically they remain unmistakably his.

The 55th Venice Biennale featured four movies — *Junior War*, *CENTER JENNY*, *Comma Boat*, and *Item Falls* (all 2013) — projected within austere architectural settings conceived by the artists. The expanded, three-dimensional frames are reminiscent of vacant suburban environments — an empty bedroom, a pool house or bleachers — punctuated by portentous details: a chain-link fence or a pile of sleeping bags. Each space functions as a threshold: a Narniaesque wardrobe unleashing the visitor into Fitch and Trecartin’s universe. The viewing areas, termed “sculptural theaters” by the art-

Previous page:
Junior War, 2013 (video still) Courtesy of the Artist; Regen Projects, Los Angeles; and Andrea Rosen, New York

This page:
Lizzie Fitch / Ryan Trecartin, Public Crop, Local Dock, Porch Limit, 2011-13
Installation view, Punta della Dogana, Venice, 2013
Courtesy of the Artists; New Galerie, Paris; and Regen Projects, Los Angeles
Photography by ORCH orsenigo_chemollo

ists, mirror the vernacular of the on-screen sets and thus feel simultaneously anonymous and familiar, capturing an uneasy domesticity heightened by the cool glow of the projections. The movies themselves stand on their own as discrete works but relate to one another on a quasi-familial level. In an orchestrated symbiosis, they are strengthened when presented in tandem: together they generate an increasingly complete yet exponentially complex picture of a realm that will always be partially obfuscated.

Junior War, *CENTER JENNY*, *Comma Boat*, and *Item Falls* are joined by a tension between history and evolution, a theme that emerged while Trecartin was revisiting footage he shot of his peers during high school in Ohio in the late '90s. The repercussions of Trecartin's excavation were two-fold: he developed an increasingly clear understanding of the ways in which the human relationship to the camera has evolved, and he was motivated to pare down his ideas. Selecting from across thirty-two of his teenage tapes, he edited a fraction of the original footage to create *Junior War*. The 1999 source material captured a prior self as well as a bygone adolescent: before social media, the ubiquity of cell phones, and streaming video. Trecartin recognized the transformation on a behavioral and linguistic level, and the marked difference came to shape the plots, scripts and tenor of the accompanying movies that he filmed in 2013.

Influence is integral to Trecartin's practice; during his scriptwriting, he dips into the conversations, encounters and verbal snippets that ferment throughout

his personal experience. Although he is an avid collaborator and relies on a consistent cross-pollination with Fitch, Trecartin's writing process is entirely solitary. He is fascinated by rhetoric and how humans use words as a framing device; as such he is both obsessive when it comes to language and intentionally reckless, reveling equally in moments of exaction and chance. For these movies, Trecartin sought to challenge the very concept of a script. He imagined a narrative structure that was non-linear, fragmented and exploded — a script in 3-D.

Fitch and Trecartin devised a 360-degree filming experience that marries the visual composition of reality television with the ubiquity of surveillance to gather a surplus of audio and visual data that could be arranged into an endless number of narratives. The artists rendered their fantasy set in the open source 3-D modeling program SketchUp and hired professionals to fabricate it to human scale in a sound studio in Burbank. Inspired by a game show, the set describes a place for learning and recreation, while establishing a physical locus to engage standard entertainment relationships between host, talent, audience and crew. Although Trecartin plans the minutiae of his scripts and shoots, he counts on some ideas to emerge naturally — moments when an actor spontaneously inserts himself or herself into a scene, or the footage taken when he hands his camera off during a break. Fitch and Trecartin engineered charged spaces that would inspire unpredictability: a bed that spins like a lazy Susan, a working hot tub, a proscenium stage that can transition into a pit outfitted with trampolines. It is neither inside nor outside, but



a contained world. In a post-digital era, this is what a fallout shelter might look like: an auto-generated habitat—unique, customizable and sterile.

Filming takes place throughout the night; in the spring of 2013 the artists held eighteen shoots from approximately 8 pm until sunrise with three to five cameras active at a time, generating hundreds of hours of footage. Everyone on set was in costume, outfitted in athletic sweatshirts calling out their role: “Witness” for the director and film crew; “Audition” for the sorority-style competitors, and so on, thus eliminating any distinction between on and offstage. Each participant was miked and all of the input was fed through a PA system and auto-tuned in real time, which encouraged experimentation and allowed for more extraneous material to be usable. During filming the set was locked down with no exception. Fitch and Trecartin have worked to cocoon the adrenaline-fueled process; participating means temporarily letting go of the outside world, giving in to the hallucinatory process, and forgetting the time of day.

The physics governing Trecartin’s movie-universe are essential to any greater understanding of the works. In 1936 Walter Benjamin contended that watching a film alters the very structure of perception. When considered together, the movies *Junior War*, *CENTER JENNY*, *Comma Boat*, and *Item Falls* posit a related but more extreme theory of technology-induced evolution. Trecartin suggests that our capabilities are so advanced that they already differentiate us irreversibly from our ancestors. The starting point for the new movies thus follows a series of postulations: What if humans con-

tinued to evolve into an animated or automated state? What if the convergence of certain technological advances caused a second Big Bang?

CENTER JENNY describes a world in the distant future, post-human, when the predominant beings are studying their ancestors. Dinosaurs are believed to have evolved into chickens. In its historicization, the human era is drastically oversimplified and learned through a gaming system. *CENTER JENNY* is set in this game-cum-university, where an army of pupils all named “Jenny” enter with the classification Basic, and aim to proceed to levels 1, 2, and onward, in a caste system that is an evolution-based hierarchy of power and knowledge. It is a platform for competition and cruelty, modeled after the most ubiquitous social structures in place today.

At the helm is Sara Source, referred to by the girls as “the source,” who resides in Level Center and keeps company with her sidekick Monika Nark, played by sisters Renee and Aubrey Plaza. Sara is privileged and wealthy, and owns a system to automate her homework so she can go on vacation with her parents. The protagonist of the film is Basic Jenny, played by Rachel Lord, the newest entrant into the university system and thus the most inferior. Over the course of the movie, viewers watch her lose and gain a meager allotment of agency. It concludes around Trecartin’s darkest and most visually charged sequence to date, as Lord’s character is splayed out and voluntarily hazed, covered in Sharpie markings by a swarm of girls while her professor lectures in her ear.

Previous page:
Item Falls, 2013 (video still)

This page:
CENTER JENNY, 2013
(video still)

Courtesy of the Artist; Regen Projects, Los Angeles; and Andrea Rosen, New York





Art in America

NEWS & FEATURES EXHIBITIONS MAGAZINE

MAGAZINE JUN. 03, 2013

Featured in
Art in America
Jun. 2013 Issue



IN THE STUDIO: RYAN TRECARTIN

by Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer



Ryan Trecartin in his
as-yet untitled video,
2013.

All images courtesy
Andrea Rosen Gallery,
New York, and Regen
Projects, Los Angeles.

There is nothing else in today's art world even remotely like Ryan Trecartin's videos. Copying and pasting a crazy collage of dialects and accents, the protagonists—so many young, sexually ambiguous, wig-wearing and face-painted chatterboxes—deliver compu-pop poetry about their chronic over-existence. It's a sci-fi theater of the absurd for our manically paced YouTube era, a singular vision created by Trecartin in collaboration with his creative partner, Lizzie Fitch. His movies take up the torch of forebears like George Kuchar, Andy Warhol, Jack Smith, John Waters, Cindy Sherman, Alex Bag and Cameron Jamie. But, to Trecartin, apparent resemblances are merely superficial and retroactive; he is either uninterested or claims ignorance when any connections are made.

Born in Webster, Tex., in 1981 and raised in rural Ohio, Trecartin was what he calls "a tech major" (film/animation/video) at the Rhode Island School of Design, in Providence, where he lived with a group of art students who came to be the core of his collaborative team. He attracted the attention of the art world in 2004 with his senior thesis, a video called



A Family Finds Entertainment, which was posted online—as all his videos tend to be. Two years later he was included in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, "Day for Night," and his first feature, *I-Be Area*, screened at New York's Elizabeth Dee Gallery in 2007. By all critical accounts, Trecartin and Fitch's immersive, setlike video installations (dubbed "sculptural theaters") stole the show at the New Museum's "Younger Than Jesus" survey in 2009. And their tour-de-force seven-part suite, *Any Ever* (2009-10), which was presented at museums around the world, fixed Trecartin in the firmament.

Throughout all the hoopla of this meteoric rise, Trecartin and Fitch have kept a conspicuous distance from New York, opting instead to live and work in Providence, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Miami and now Los Angeles, where they have been based since 2010. In L.A., Fitch-Trecartin Studios—the essence of sprawl, low and vast—occupies a warehouse just off the freeway in Burbank. Shooting recently wrapped for a new group of multichannel videos (his first since *Any Ever*) that Trecartin is presenting inside five freestanding sculptural theaters in "The Encyclopedic Palace," curated by Massimiliano Gioni, at the 55th Venice Biennale. Retaining the awkward, blocky feel of its SketchUp origins, the L.A. set was one big room fragmented into themed zones replete with an enormous hot tub, a spinning bed, bleachers and at least a dozen disconnected toilets. But the set was deserted: party over. Trecartin and I spoke in April at his Los Feliz home and studio, where he had just resurfaced from his latest 30-hour-plus session editing these as-yet-untitled movies.

SARAH LEHRER-GRAIWER All of your videos are so layered and ambitious, I'm curious how you feel talking about a work when you're still in the middle of it.

RYAN TRECARTIN Because I work so collaboratively, I never know what the works are fully going to be until they're done. So I can't really talk about them until then. It's typical that the things I think they're about end up being background linearities, or like a larger mesh across the movies. The most interesting concepts I'm working on at a particular time are not in the forefront of my brain; the script works as a vehicle to dig into deeper, non-frontal questions.

I structure the movies more to create opportunities or obstacles than as planned works. I definitely embrace the unintended, even in the editing. Often I discover plots or ideas that I didn't know were there, and I then cut them into the work, altering the original script. I don't title works until they're finished.

LEHRER-GRAIWER Is this project for Venice a discrete work?

TRECARTIN It's a first phase. I showed three movies in "Younger Than Jesus" and at the time I knew they were going to grow into a larger system of works, but I hadn't conceived of *Any Ever* formally yet or its structure, which ended up being seven movies in total.

LEHRER-GRAIWER Are you at a comparable stage with this new work?

TRECARTIN Yeah, except that what I'm showing in Venice is complete in itself. I'll continue to work with all the material we shot this spring and continue to shoot more, probably over the next couple of years. Instead of discovering its phase logic gradually through the process, Lizzie [Fitch] and I have planned the phases ahead of time, which changes the way we film and build sets. We're deliberately challenging our process—the way we actually organize and make our ideas happen.

LEHRER-GRAIWER Do you mean logistically, as in the way you organize people?

TRECARTIN I mean everything. We now feel more of a responsibility to our work than we used to. Since 2011, we've had to think about continuing to exhibit our work and manage its installation so it shows the way we intend. (Our works are not easy to install.) I'm lucky to have a creative partnership where we believe in each other. You can do so much more with someone else than you can alone. One person's ideas become less important, and it's the exchange that matters. The nuance and particularity of how things are shared between people makes something special. I'm not interested in one-to-one ratios, but in what happens when many people's associations merge in unexpected combinations.

LEHRER-GRAIWER Have you and Lizzie lived together since 2000, when you first began collaborating?

TRECARTIN Aside from gaps for logistical reasons, we pretty much have lived together the whole time. I've done everything with Lizzie. I have also lived near [artist] Rhett LaRue since 2000. The three of us have worked together, on and off, since 2005.

LEHRER-GRAIWER The movies are a focal point where your collaborative network converges.

TRECARTIN There's this idea in these new scripts that an audience revolution takes place in which people are liberated. The movie supposes that if you ignore or abuse something long enough it'll create an "I" and gain free will. The revolution generates multiple worlds that are interior, pioneering into consciousness rather than outward into space and matter. That begins an era of multiple, parallel worlds rather than one of leaders, audiences, crowds and mass.

LEHRER-GRAIWER The idea of making a self—an "I"—out of ideas and nonhuman objects has been bubbling in your work for a while.

TRECARTIN That's a very deep concept for me and shows up in all aspects of the work, even in the stand-alone sculptures that Lizzie and I make together, which I think of more as scripts, games, personalities or behaviors than sculptures.

LEHRER-GRAIWER Where did the "personality" for your new movie come from?

TRECARTIN I recently revisited some footage I shot back in 1999, basically right after *The Blair Witch Project* came out, when I was a senior in high school. It's full of night vision. Watching my old footage now is so strange; people had a very different relationship to the camera. They didn't want to be filmed. Then they either forgot the camera was there, which doesn't happen now, or they narrated what they were doing. You can see how people's relationship to the camera used to be really primitive.

These high school videos inspired a lot of this project's content in a way that I'm not sure I'm comfortable with. I've started thinking about the footage in relation to anthropology.

LEHRER-GRAIWER How so? As in going undercover in a subculture?

TRECARTIN Anthropology is one of those things that eludes me. The "study of humans" could mean anything. I'm interested in the way people simultaneously negotiate divergent presentations of themselves for a variety of contexts. American culture has always had people in occupations that have to do that—politicians, PR agents, narcs.

LEHRER-GRAIWER You play a character in the new movie who I've heard referred to by your collaborators as the "dick director." What kind of director is that character and what kind of a director are you?

TRECARTIN My character was commenting on everyone's delivery of their lines in a very linear and aggressive way, like that person just said this and here's my response posted on a message board. He was very into stopping or blocking things from happening by narrating them in real time.

That's the character's agenda; as a director, I shoot from scripts very linearly. A script might be 15 pages and I just go straight through, line by line. Normally I don't show anyone the script. Sometimes lines are assigned to people ahead of time and sometimes not. Sometimes I direct body language or encourage an accent. I used to break the script down into short lines five or six words long, and have

someone say them over and over. They would say them so many times that they might forget what they were saying.

This time I fed people paragraph-long lines and told them to say what they thought I said back to the camera. That kind of distortion of the script has been important. It's a very intense thing to put someone through. I'm asking for a lot of trust and I take that trust very seriously.

There were about a hundred people in this project, half I know well and half I've never worked with. The sets were built in a warehouse and are not domestic scale. I learned that the amount of physical space between you and a wall is significant. I was shocked by how much the space changed acting behaviors and me as a director.

LEHRER-GRAIWER Was the spaciousness freeing?

TRECARTIN No, the opposite! Free isn't the right word. The architecture created a situation where people felt they should project, even though we miked them individually. It's different than yelling. Someone trying to project their voice out is less subtle in their body. I try to avoid theater associations like projection. I like things that feel real, even if someone's acting completely psycho, it should be convincing as a person being animated and bizarre. I only like put-ons when they are used to communicate an idea.

LEHRER-GRAIWER It seems like another important directorial decision was to shoot at night.

TRECARTIN But we always shoot all night long. That started years ago because I hated setting up lights; it ruins the flow. Night shoots are the easiest way to make sure no light comes in the windows. I also realized that at night people are less likely to get phone calls and e-mails. The performances I'm looking for require being possessed and falling into a fragile zone that is easily ruined. On nighttime shoots, people are more in touch with edgier, perverse thoughts. Their associations are different than daytime associations. Unpredictable and repressed things come out when people get really tired.

LEHRER-GRAIWER That nocturnal quality feels timeless, the same way the sets are a no-place place. That unlocatable space is very specific to your videos.

TRECARTIN I don't ever establish location when I'm shooting. Instead of a person saying something within a space, I want to think about the space being on top of or framing the words.

LEHRER-GRAIWER Does that pose a relationship between place and media? Or maybe place is just data located in a box or hard drive.

TRECARTIN I'm actually trying to think past technology at this point and more about creative desire. People want to feel situated and located, but they don't want to feel like they're a slave to anything. To deal with limitations of place, characters in the movie make "fourth-wall generators," "fifth-wall randomizers," "location situators" and "consciousness expanders," forcing old forms of exchange into scenarios that allow something to be broken. I'm interested in establishing a structure of obedient behaviors so that obedience can trigger destructive impulses.

LEHRER-GRAIWER And give way to disobedience?

TRECARTIN Yeah. The first phase of this project is supposed to be like level one in a gaming system, where human ancestors are accessed as information. It's a game and it's also a university. In the first level of the game, no one has a name—or rather, everyone's named Jenny at first.

LEHRER-GRAIWER How do you specifically address the idea of mainstream American youth culture? The world of this new movie seems to be overtly fratty, sorority, college, MTV, spring breaker-esque.

TRECARTIN And it's accessed in a way that's super-reduced and basic. The idea that "pop" and "mass" are more a constructed, marketing idea than a lived reality keeps coming up in the movie. Characters constantly say they don't want to go Top 40 because they want to be niche and pick their own fans. They refuse to be filtered through a sense of "mass."

LEHRER-GRAIWER Has this new body of work been influenced by the fact that you've been living in L.A.? You have a bigger budget and are using Hollywood professionals for the first time—like set builders and some professional actresses. Is your "dick director" character modeled on a Hollywood type?

TRECARTIN No. Directing happens in all fields, not just movie-making. I was thinking of my director character more as an animator. In this movie, humans evolve into animations. Then the animations generate their own free will. It's suggested that, in the movies, no one is human after all, but just animated. However, basing the design of the set on different television conventions was in my mind because of being in Los Angeles. Sitcoms and game shows always shoot from the same angles where one wall, the fourth wall, is missing. We

positioned several open sets around a central stage so it became a continuous 360-degree situation: no inside, no outside, no separate audience position, no clear delineation of roles, on or off stage.

LEHRER-GRAIWER Is that different from your previous movies?

TRECARTIN I've always done 360-degree sets, but this is the first time I took the idea outside of a domestic space. There were multiple cameras. If you were helping with the shoot you were in costume too. The crew, who appear in the shots, wear sweatshirts with the word "Witness" on them. They also wear green hats, because I associate green-screen color with production; there is a lot of green-screen color that I'm not keying out. My character also wears a Witness sweatshirt. He's the most vocal Witness, though everyone in the sweatshirts is really part of the same conglomerate character. That character is the point of access for us viewers.

LEHRER-GRAIWER Your work has generally taken a positive, optimistic outlook on the prospect of subject formation today, despite the homogenizing force of global corporate culture. Does this movie take a darker turn?

TRECARTIN I do think I've taken a darker turn. I generally feel very positive, but pretty soon I think there are going to be basic freedoms and rights that we're going to have to fight for.

All my movies have addressed that tipping point where one freedom replaces another. This has a lot to do with surveillance—not video camera surveillance, but the surveillance of people's activities, and the creation of algorithms that allow programs, companies or governments to understand what you like, buy or own. I think this is exciting and scary. Rhett sent me an article about the automation of the court systems, suggesting computers could do a better job of judging a crime than humans. Now that sounds scary to me because, personally, I like feeling that if I had to I could talk my way out of something. Clearly we're going to evolve into something beyond what we are now, so it doesn't really matter.

LEHRER-GRAIWER Could you say more about that?

TRECARTIN Once technology makes it possible to alter our brains, we're going to. Not everyone will. There will be more than one species of what are now humans. That split might follow class lines. Who knows? In the past couple of years I've felt like the outcome is not set. I feel more angst and anger than usual.

LEHRER-GRAIWER Does that angst correspond to your own trajectory of rapid success?

TRECARTIN I'm sure it does in some ways. But I try to only pay attention to expectations coming from my friends and peers, the people that I really care about. I don't really have anything in particular to say about art-world success, because for the most part I feel extremely lucky and excited to have the resources to be able to focus on making art.

I felt a similar angst and anger during the making of *I-Be Area* [2007]. I think it's a phase. When I made *A Family Finds Entertainment* [2004], I was in a very positive state. With *I-Be Area*, I rebelled and made the process hard on myself. After beating myself up during *I-Be Area*, *Any Ever* [2009-10] came out in a very natural, inspired way. *Any Ever* has perversion and darkness but generally embraces the attitude that as long as you stay aware and utilize things that are happening to and around you, you're still free.

This new project focuses more on basic human interactions, blending the lines between controlled experience and complete breakdown.

LEHRER-GRAIWER Breakdown as a way to get perspective?

TRECARTIN Yeah, to disassociate and fall apart. When a relationship stops being challenging and starts coasting, usually someone breaks the other person or themselves. Maybe humanity doesn't actually like stability all that much.

LEHRER-GRAIWER You brought Parkour guys on set. Parkour stunts evolved out of military training on obstacle courses, right? And the whole spring-break vibe is very American. I've heard that a lot of props on your set were weaponized, like earmuffs stuffed with razor blades, as though any depiction of "mainstream America" would have a bellicose dimension.

TRECARTIN That's a big part of it. People in the movie talk about funding wars as if that were a badge. Characters are always talking about how they've weaponized things, even family members. I weaponized the party gear, like big red Solo cups that shatter, to mirror the idea that something pleasant, communal and social can be used as a weapon.

LEHRER-GRAIWER You're a fan of the TV show *Killer Karaoke*, which imposes risk-taking to exaggerate performance. Has that influenced this project?

TRECARTIN I love that show! It definitely inspired my directing style for this movie, now that I think about it. Movement didn't happen like it used to in my work because shooting on one big open

set actually produced a trapped feeling; so risk had to instigate movement.

A lot more happens in real time in this project. Normally I shoot to create material for the editing process, not for the live performances. This was different; the raw footage is really fun to watch.

LEHRER-GRAIWER Is that partly because you used some professional, celebrity actresses?

TRECARTIN We just used a few. I wanted to work with Molly Tarlov [from the MTV show *Awkward*], Aubrey Plaza [from *Parks and Recreation*] and Alia Shawkat [from *Arrested Development*]. Natalie Love and Jena Malone are in it, too. Jena was already a friend beforehand. I have always loved actresses in secondary roles who you wish were onscreen more.

LEHRER-GRAIWER Were they familiar with your practice?

TRECARTIN I don't think so, except for Jena, but they watched it and said yes. It wasn't that different from directing friends, which was great. They were good at saying something that sounds absurd and delivering it with a sense of decisiveness and confidence that's controlled yet belligerent.

LEHRER-GRAIWER Do you think their age is part of why they were such a good fit?

TRECARTIN Yeah, they're all generally my age or younger. I'm 32. People born in the '80s, particularly '86 and after, really do have a different way of accessing performance.

I've always been very unnostalgic about history, which is just as creative and malleable as the future. I don't

think people need to be hung up on accuracy. A larger objective history is just not important. I think we're moving into a world where, as everything gets captured and recorded, we're gaining a new sense of time. Someday we'll be able to time travel through information. The focus will then shift to intention and feelings.

I used to be fine with the idea that we supposedly make things to be maintained for history, but I don't think that will matter in the future. If you're making something for history or legacy or the ages, it's in vain. The only thing that matters to me at this moment is making things for the present—and the future. It's not about becoming a part of history. Timelessness is a romantic throwaway.

Currently on view Ryan Trecartin in "The Encyclopedic Palace," at the 55th Venice Biennale, through Nov. 24.

Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer is a Los Angeles-based writer.

Related Articles



MAGAZINE

In the Studio: Kathe Burkhart

by Jane Ursula Harris

Kathe Burkhart is best known for her "Liz Taylor" series (1982-ongoing), a self-portrait project in which the late iconic actress serves as the artist's double. Speaking about the paintings... [READ MORE](#)



MAGAZINE

In the Studio: Amie Siegel

by Steel Stillman

Best known for her cinematic video *Provenance* (2013)—which traces the ownership history of chairs designed by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret from their current well-heeled owners back to the... [READ MORE](#)



MAGAZINE

In the Studio: Stanya Kahn

by Tracy Jeanne Rosenthal

"Did it work?" a voice interjects from a window. "Yes and no," a witch replies, looking down at her body, now covered in protruding cocks. On large panels shocked with primary colors, Kahn draws a... [READ MORE](#)



MAGAZINE

Reading Capital in Venice

by Travis Jeppesen With Drawings By Bjarne Melgaard

Touring the Biennale, a fictional critic muses on the contradictions between the show's socially-conscious theme and its wealth-and-fame realities. 1. It is the spring of dead bodies, failed... [READ MORE](#)

Item Falls was the only movie that was filmed at Fitch and Trecartin's rambling home in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Los Feliz. It is awash with animations designed by longtime collaborator and fellow RISD graduate Rhet LaRue — from spinning architectural models to hovering baseball caps and red Solo cups that splinter into cascades of confetti. The characters brag about their free will and the chickens they have bred and trained for stunts. As they speak, the actors devolve into 2-D animations, their faces periodically emerging as cartoonish drawings of black lines and color planes. At other junctures, 3-D animations rendered to look like the actors perform basic functions such as walking or sleeping. In *Item Falls*, all characters are nameless; everyone's identity and social standing is up for grabs based on their performances at auditions and their ability to evolve across different animation stages.

Throughout the filming process of *CENTER JENNY* and *Item Falls*, Trecartin remained in character as a hostile and unstable film director. The footage of Trecartin at work — a portrait of the artist in his studio, of sorts — is the material that makes up the three-channel movie *Comma Boat*. Most often, Trecartin takes a dictatorial approach, feeding the actors paragraphs to recite to the camera while he becomes increasingly frustrated, or using expletives to motivate large groups of actors into formation. At other points he sits on the sidelines, chattering in a saccharine-calm pitch about words, alphabets and the history of the world, while writing a script for a potential character that he himself would play. Entirely non-narrative, the movie adopts a behind-the-scenes, process-based structure of reaction and response.

In 1957 Marcel Duchamp wrote "The Creative Act," a short text in which he argued that the artist is partially a conduit — that during the process of making art there is no way to be fully self-conscious. Trecartin is an exemplar of this theory; trusting in what is unintentionally expressed, his subconscious acts as an essential source for the ideas and associations that come to life in his work. In his blinder-style form of making, Trecartin powers forward, relying on the world around him to oversaturate his mind and vision, creating a multiplicity of untraceable influences that he absorbs into his practice. Aspects of his work mash up the spectacle and overload aesthetic of Jason Rhodes, Francis Picabia's use of machine forms to portray human characteristics in his *portraits mécaniques*, the vivid object-driven tableaux of Isa Genzken, or the impetus of cubists to carve up their subjects in order to show multiple perspectives simultaneously. Stylistic references, though unintentional, are essential for audiences to take steps toward contextualizing the work.

Although Trecartin binges on aftereffects, composes music using royalty-free ringtones, and films the painted faces of his peers as they navigate a web of incomprehensible story fragments, his experimentations in structure and form reveal his ambition for a precision of expression. In the '30s, László Moholy-Nagy predicted that images would become an essential form of communication when he asserted that the future il-

literate would be those people unable to use a camera. Looking forward, editing is on its way to becoming a universal language, while tools like graphics and animation become the diction and lexicon allowing for its communication. Trecartin mines this vocabulary, forcefully evolving editing into something that can stand on its own as a form of expression. By articulating from within the specific nonsense and excess that characterizes our culture today, Trecartin addresses the universal ambiguity at the core of human experience. Far from creating commentary on, or parody of, media and its various equipment, he uses technology as a language to inquire into timeless questions about the nature of existence. While digital trappings may seem inextricable from his project, the artist is confident that if video did not exist he would be pursuing his explorations through the mediums of poetry or dance.

Trecartin has identified a pattern in his work: one movie lays out a new set of principles that the subsequent group comes to actualize. *I-BE AREA* (2007), for example, presented the structures and theories that *Trill-ogy Comp* (2009) and *Re'Search Wait'S* (2009–10) completed. With this most recent project, Trecartin is once again in the first phase, building and describing ideas that a future suite of movies will internalize. As Trecartin further stretches the boundaries of the medium, he will continue to challenge the viewer's ability to evolve alongside it.

Ryan Trecartin (b. 1981, Webster, Texas)
lives in Los Angeles.

Selected solo shows:

Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami; MoMA PS1, New York; MOCA, Los Angeles; The Power Plant, Toronto; Kunsthalle Wien; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio.

Selected group shows:

Fridericianum, Kassel; 55th Venice Biennale; Punta della Dogana, Palazzo Grassi, Venice; Kunsthau Zürich; Zabłudowicz Collection, London; Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm; Guggenheim Museum, New York; Rubell Family Collection, Miami; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; New Museum, New York; 8th Gwangju Biennale; Garage Center for Contemporary Culture, Moscow; ZKM, Karlsruhe; ICA, Philadelphia; Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

In 2014, solo shows by Ryan Trecartin will be hosted at Zabłudowicz Collection, London; UCCA, Beijing; and Kunst-Werke, Berlin.

Jarrett Gregory is Associate Curator of Contemporary Art at LACMA, Los Angeles.

Previous page:
Ryan Trecartin, Lizzie Fitch / Ryan Trecartin, Priority Innfield (Fence, Pole, Tilt, Villa, Way), 2013
Installation views, 55th Venice Biennale, 2013
Courtesy of the Artists; Regen Projects, Los Angeles; and Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York
Photography by Fulvio Orsenigo



PHOTOGRAPHS BY TY CACER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above, a scene from the video "Ready (RE'Search Wait'S)," part of Ryan Trecartin's show "Any Ever" at MoMA PSI, with Mr. Trecartin in one of his video personas. Below, the room installation where that video is shown, with museum visitors listening to the video's soundtrack on headphones.

Like Living, Only More So

"Am I overexisting or am I overexisting? That is my inner joke." These words — evoking a doubt-free Hamlet unfazed about whether or not to be — bounce forth from the tumult of video, furniture, music, extreme makeup and insistent jabberwocky that form "Any Ever," Ryan Trecartin's game-changing exhibition at MoMA PSI in Long Island City, Queens.

The question is posed on screen by Mr. Trecartin himself, in the role of Wait, one of several video personas he assumes to interact with an extended supporting cast of young, energetic cross-dressers; eccentrics; globally ambitious hobbyists; friendly freaks; and the odd child or household pet. Their wild, sometimes incoherent exchanges teeter giddily at the intersection of art, reality television and social networking, and unfurl across seven related, frenetically edited videos made during the last two years. Keep an eye out especially for Telfar Clemens, the magnetic group leader in drag; Veronica Gelbaum, a riveting young Norma Desmond type; and Lizzie Fitch, the free-floating pundit who is also Mr. Trecartin's chief collabora-

tor on all fronts. In these videos characters screech and squeal, debate and argue in high-pitched Chipmunkese or bottom-feeding growls; scenes jump-cut back and forth; makeup is a form of painting in its own right. Images (and characters) multiply, split and mutate. Gender, identity and skin tone are nothing if not



fluid, and plotlines are aggressively nonlinear. Corporate game plans and family ties entangle, often with great intensity of feeling. Tweets and text messages blink on the screen, and spoken language seems on the verge of re-invention. People break things, jump into pools, make paintings, tip over sculpture. And it doesn't stop there.

fluid, and plotlines are aggressively nonlinear. Corporate game plans and family ties entangle, often with great intensity of feeling. Tweets and text messages blink on the screen, and spoken language seems on the verge of re-invention. People break things, jump into pools, make paintings, tip over sculpture. And it doesn't stop there.

fluid, and plotlines are aggressively nonlinear. Corporate game plans and family ties entangle, often with great intensity of feeling. Tweets and text messages blink on the screen, and spoken language seems on the verge of re-invention. People break things, jump into pools, make paintings, tip over sculpture. And it doesn't stop there.

Ryan Trecartin
Any Ever
MoMA PSI

At PSI each video is projected large in its own insane room, carpeted throughout and densely arrayed with couches, yard furniture, airplane seats, gym equipment or conference tables and all sorts of other stuff stacked around the edges. Nothing is as it should be, strictly speaking. One room features six couches whose feet are planted in cheap-looking designer-purse knockoffs. In another, couches are placed on bed frames stacked on bookcases and reached by plastic ladders. As with the work of artists like Paul McCarthy, Matthew Barney and Pipilotti Rist — only more so — these situations effectively break the grip of the black-box video theater and forge a new integration of video and installation art.

Mr. Trecartin (pronounced tra-KAR-tun), who is 30 and made his New York gallery debut in 2007, is definitely overexisting. His PSI spectacular is his

Continued on Page 26

Like Living, Only More So: A Giddy Intersection



BY CACER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

From Weekend Page 25

first major museum show in New York; it reveals an immense but not fully developed talent that seems bound for greatness. At the risk of oversimplification, his art could be said to combine the retinal extravagance of much 1980s art with the political awareness of the '90s and the inclusiveness and technological savvy of the postmillennium. This exhibition shreds the false dichotomies and mutually demonizing oppositions that have plagued the art world for decades — between the political and the aesthetic, the conceptual and the formal, high and low, art and entertainment, outsider and insider, irony and sincerity, gay and straight. Queerness here is not a cause; it is a constant condition that has now permeated the culture at large.

Mr. Trecartin was born in Texas and grew up in Ohio, and by his own account was not much exposed to art as a child. In interviews he has cited Disney and the disco music his babysitters listened to as important influences. Like many children, he enjoyed the age-old games of dressing up and putting on plays with friends; but, growing up in a time when cameras were becoming ubiquitous and also digital, he began to photograph these stagings when he was in sixth grade.

Shortly thereafter, a photography teacher showed him images of Cindy Sherman's work. Her influence is evident in the groups of blond-wigged Sherman-like creatures (men and women) who swarm through several videos, especially one titled "K-CorealNC.K (section a)," in which, overseen by Mr. Clemens, they clamorously fill several rows of airline seats.

Mr. Trecartin entered the Rhode Island School of Design in 2000, soon after Apple introduced its iMovie software, which made it possible to edit video on the computer. Fast-forward to 2005, the year after he graduated, when "A Fam-

ily Finds Entertainment," the manic, color-saturated 40-minute video that was Mr. Trecartin's senior thesis — as well as his way of coming out to his parents — was screened to a wildly enthusiastic audience at the New York Underground Film Festival. It marked the beginning of his rapid rise, both in the art world and on the Internet, where all his work is available. Since then he and Ms. Fitch have become known for video and video-installation presentations that have progressively redefined both genres.

This redefinition is in full cry at PSI, where the controlled chaos of the videos can feel thrillingly continuous with the spaces in which they are viewed. Two of the videos here were seen in funkier environments orchestrated by Mr. Trecartin and Ms. Fitch in "Younger Than Jesus" at the New Museum in 2009. The mises-en-scènes are socially and visually sharper and work better at PSI, where they are composed almost entirely of furnishings from Ikea, as are many of the sets in the videos. In addition to the massed décor there is ambient music, most of it composed by Mr. Trecartin, which oscillates from room to room. Visitors must don large, cushy headsets to get the full gist of the individual videos, a cocooning experience that parallels the physical cocooning of the furnishings. The show is a rabbit hole full of rabbit holes.

Mr. Trecartin seems intent on a kind of sensorial overload that you may initially think only new media can provide. But in many ways the idea of giving viewers more than they can instantaneously absorb is almost as old as art itself and is what keeps us coming back to it. Earlier versions of this overload include the endless detail of Jan van Eyck's paintings, the collapsing simultaneities of Cubism, Jackson Pollock's skeins of dripped paint or, to cite more obvious predecessors of Mr. Trecartin's work, the found-object environments of

Ryan Trecartin's show at MoMA PS1 creates distinctly designed environments filled with furniture and other elements meant to complement a particular video. This room features the video "K-CorealNC.K (section a)."

Edward Kienholz and the gender-bending costume-drama orgies of the filmmaker Jack Smith.

Still, new technology has allowed Mr. Trecartin to articulate and dimensionalize his version of overload more fully. True to his early admiration for Disney, his labor-intensive editing, carefully scripted cross talk (despite all signs of improvisation) and other digital machinations have allowed him to negotiate a blend of animated and actual life never dreamed of by the creators of the film "Who Framed Roger Rabbit" or the virtual world Second Life. In the process he has also brought such disparate elements as language and furniture, music and makeup into active, mutually enhancing play, in which he neglects few opportunities for manipulation. In "Ready (RE'Search Wait'S)," one of the more recent videos, a combination of actual makeup and digital adjustment enables Mr. Trecartin to transform himself effortlessly from Wait, a relatively shy wallflower, to J. J., a bronze-god painter who is surrounded by hand-made and mechanical images and cascades of iridescent color.

At the heart of Mr. Trecartin's elaborate worldview is an aspirational faith in the potential of uninhibited self-expression, both individual and collective, as an active agent against the mounting materialism of everyday life. This is in a sense the story of his own hypertalented overexistence, now aided and abetted by a fluctuating crew of co-conspirators with gifts, charisma and minds of their own. What he has unleashed is larger than himself, which is why both his sudden appearance and continuing evolution are such cause for hope.

"Ryan Trecartin: Any Ever" runs through Sept. 3 at MoMA PS1, 22-25 Jackson Avenue, Long Island City, Queens; (718) 784-2084, MoMAPSI.org.

THE NEW YORKER

THE ART WORLD

PARTY ON

Ryan Trecartin at P.S. 1.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

"Ryan Trecartin: Any Ever"—four hours' worth of seven looping videos, projected, at P.S. 1, in rooms featuring ambient music, eccentric seating arrangements of Ikea furniture, and a party atmosphere—demands, or, rather, clamors, to be seen. It's an exhilarating onslaught, loaded with bizarre charm, of fast, noisy, animation-enhanced perfor-

the most consequential artist to have emerged since the nineteen-eighties, when Jeff Koons inaugurated an era of baleful glitz. Trecartin, making a big, sophisticated, operatic art of YouTube styles and sensibilities, is being hailed as the magus of the Internet age. I'll subject that statement to some skeptical due diligence, but first I'll go it one better:

a substitute teacher. He had to repeat the first grade, which made him older than his peers in the high-school class of 2000. He has said that he always loved organizing games of playacting with friends—his specialty to this day—and that he was aware early on of being gay, but that news of the AIDS epidemic made him shy of sex. It takes a while, watching his videos, to realize that, though they appear to suggest orgiastic goings on, they actually display little or no sex, nudity, drink, drugs, smoking, or, except for the odd smashed glass or bric-a-brac, violence. Without the abundant vernacular profanity—which is speeded up or echoed, becoming largely unintelligible, like nearly all of Trecartin's scripted dialogue—the work would warrant a PG rating. He made his first dis-



Fast forward: a shot from Trecartin's video "Roamie View: History Enhancement (Re'Search Wait'S)" (2009-10).

mances by a cohort of uninhibited young folks, shot over a year and a half, mostly in a humdrum house in Miami, and finished last year. The show affirms a craze among many in the New York art world for Trecartin, the Texas-born wunderkind, now thirty. The furor took hold in 2008, with his triumph in "Younger Than Jesus," an international roundup of young artists, at the New Museum. To put it simply, Trecartin—aided by his close collaborator, Lizzie Fitch, and a revolving cast of often cross-dressing cutups, starring himself—is

Trecartin slices through the art world's bondage to commercial and institutional powers. Making his videos free for all, on Vimeo, he aggregates a self-selecting audience of the interested. Galleries, museums, and movie theatres are just more sociable options for presenting his work. You feel this at P.S. 1: for now, the MOMA affiliate is Trecartinland.

Trecartin has never lived in New York. Born near Houston, he moved at the age of six with his family to suburban Ohio. His father was a steelworker who now manages a recycling plant; his mother was

tinctive piece as a video major at the Rhode Island School of Design, in 2004: "A Family Finds Entertainment," in which a distraught boy at a houseparty locks himself in a bathroom, cuts himself with a knife, runs outside, is hit by a car and killed, and then is resurrected to rejoin the revels. Trecartin has not since written a plot as coherent as that one. You go with the cascading flow, viewing his videos, or you're lost and alone.

After graduating, Trecartin moved with friends to New Orleans and set to work in a house that, a year later, was de-

stroyed by flooding from Katrina. He was in Philadelphia when his video "Sibling Topics" debuted, in the "Younger Than Jesus" show. One plot, or plotlet, involves two sisters in a set of quadruplets who oblige their father's preference for triplets by merging into one. (Or so I read; with Trecartin, story matters less than what may be termed "storyness"—a Rorschach-like quality of seeming to agree eagerly with whatever interpretations occur to you.) He now lives in Los Angeles, and, wouldn't you know, he has been befriended by James Franco. In person, Trecartin is confident but unassuming, polite and open-faced. Although he chooses to remain on the fringe of the art world, he says that he likes it, as a realm "where people attempt to be able to do anything, as long as they can create a context for it."

His context, it seems, is culture at large, with no distinction between high and low. In his work, it is neither critiqued nor satirized but "digested." His all but incomprehensible scripts are spattered with buzzwords from technology and business but veer steadily into nonsense. Here's an atypically cogent nugget: "Guys I just Wanted to show You Your New Office! Health Care, I don't Care, It's ALL WE Care, That's Why WE don't Care. THIS IS GLOBAL!"

Trecartin's videos are gloriously funny but rarely permit laughter. In effect, they are rapid-fire successions of punch lines with no setups. Any shot lasting more than two seconds feels leisurely. Outlandish wigs and makeup, including painted teeth and varieties of skin color, may change in mid-scene, and keeping track of characters—with names like Demo, JoJo NoBrand, and Post-Canadian Retriever Korea—is a tall order. The costumes are mainly off-the-rack mall chic. Most of his characters are women and girls, either born that way or enacted by him and such others as the sublimely talented Telfar Clemens. Many are very pretty; all are piquant, tilting heads and tossing hair while hectoring the camera or one another. (In Florida, Trecartin availed himself of the vast pool of young performers who sing and dance, or aspire to, at Disney World.) Am I not being terribly clear about what happens on the screens at P.S. 1? I'm sorry, but you have to be there, if only online—overwhelmed utterly for a while,

then gradually caught up in rhythms, more musical than dramatic, that are very likely to commandeer your next night's dreams.

Trecartin's focus, he says, is on individuals exercising "total freedom" to be, behave, and perform as they like. The effects would be freakish if Trecartin acknowledged any social norms, but he doesn't. In my view, comparisons of him to cinematic masters of anarchic transgression like John Waters and Jack Smith are wrong. His nearest precedent is Cindy Sherman, whose photographic impersonations of people and creatures who are instantly recognizable, though they happen not to exist, relate rather directly to Trecartin's shape-shifting, goofing, yammering characters. But Sherman's demonstrations of the mutability of selfhood are reliably disturbing. Trecartin's are clownish and relentlessly upbeat. This may be a serious weakness. I am unpersuaded by his oft-stated prophecy of a future in which personal, sexual, racial, and all other identities will be masks donned or discarded at an individual's whim. It suggests a peculiar state of adolescence not just extended but universalized. As a premise for art, however, Trecartin's determined naïveté pays off beautifully, dropping us down a cosmic rabbit hole into a realm where imagination is interchangeable with reality—a condition partly inspired, he has said, by reality-TV shows, which he likes because they diminish the shame of being embarrassed in public.

Trecartin's blithely renegade relation to the art world evokes a principle of revolutionary warfare: never mind winning; just don't lose. Exasperate the enemy. Like General George Washington confounding the British, he exploits the strategic advantage of a limitless hinterland, in his case the digital jungle. Fluidity of personhood—a kind of opened-out, participatory narcissism, with aspects alternately benign and worrisome—is becoming a widely shared, common-sense aesthetic. Trecartin's affinity to others in his own and younger generations attests to his significance, as an artist who gives form to new intuitions that will unforeseeably but certainly carry social, ethical, and even political weight in the near future. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM/GO/LETSSEE

Slide Show: Ryan Trecartin.

Making Word: Ryan Trecartin as Poet

BRIAN DROITCOUR | Wednesday Jul 27th, 2011



Is Ryan Trecartin a video artist? A “video-installation” artist? [Reviewing “Any Ever,”](#) the [exhibition](#) now on view at MoMA PS1, Roberta Smith grasped for precedent, naming Paul McCarthy, Matthew Barney and Pipilotti Rist. But, she admitted, the comparisons fell short. To find another artist who engages a plurality of art forms with simultaneous, equal intensity—all while rethinking what art is and how it touches its audience—you’d have to go back to Wagner. Video is an outcome of his process, but watching is not the only or best way to understand it. Trecartin says he starts each work by writing a script. Language—the primal, biological system of symbols—is the model and vehicle for art and commerce and every other manifestation of social activity. And the forms of all the aspects of Trecartin’s work—the camerawork, the editing, the music, the makeup, and the costumes, as well as Lizzie Fitch’s sets for the videos and “sets” for their viewing in “Any Ever”—are prefigured in the way he works with words.

Meeting Attendees



To study Trecartin's language, I read the script for *K-CoreaINC.K (Section A)*, which is freely available thanks to ubuweb's "[Publishing the Unpublishable](#)" series. Like any script, it starts with *dramatis personae*: Argentinian Korea, Hungary Korea, French Adaptation Korea, and so on. The litany of locales recalls the lyrics of a club hit ("Brazil, Morocco, London to Ibiza": so sings J-Lo in "On the Floor") or the "Paris, Milan, Moscow, Tokyo" you see on the front of designer boutiques. But only remotely. Countries aren't named to evoke the exotic, but because geographic names, unlike human names, are tied to place and awkward in reuse. Slapped together, they don't merge nicely. One plus one is two ones and the ozone emitted by their collision. Combos like these are a favorite device of Trecartin's. So is the willful disregard for parts of speech. A character's "first name" can be a noun or an adjective or one of each. Grammatical difference meets geographical difference as both are jettisoned. No setting is indicated—the list of characters is enough to locate the action in an unanchored imaginary.

I've called the Koreas "characters" but the script say they're "Attendees," a designation that subordinates individual identity to temporary presence. The space-time properties of attending suit the names. These are not distinct individuals, but inflections—or international branches—of Global Korea, the star player listed at the top of the page as "Global Korea (GK): (potential Merge):". Punctuation was invented to represent the pauses and pitches of speech; long after it moved beyond this purpose to become a set of standards for clarifying the meaning of written language, punctuation marks were remixed as emoticons when writing began to take on the phatic functions of speech. Trecartin's unruly use of punctuation draws on all stages of its history. When, in the script's first lines,

Mexico Korea says “Yaw,,,,,,”, the comma does more than make a pause. It’s a winking eye torn from a smiling face, repeated until it’s a nervous tic. Colons join, parentheses cut, and in the designation of Global Korea’s role—before the dialogue even starts—those marks are staggered to herald *K-CoreaINC.K (Section A)* as a drama of belonging and difference, of where the self stands with regards to others.



Pronouns are a battlefield. “IT is not |You|,,, IT IS WE!” NAK announces. “IT is not |em| and>/ Will not matter as Such.” On the next page she says: “The New Look for This Company, IS re-Thinking the Word |Humanity| as an Object with a (Goal).” Trecartin’s use of corporate jargon brings the concrete back to “corporation,” a word that abstracts the corporeal. Dialogue is propelled by confrontations between voices of a single entity (i.e., the Koreas) and others, whose names convey difference in terms of human-resource hierarchies. A Driver—listed in the *dramatis personae* as “Pay Role: (2): Driver, Wait”—offers unsolicited business advice: “[...] Focus on finding REAL Consumer Demand,,/ For Cross-Over-Culture,,,,, ?/ And Time-Shared-Ideologies ?” The suggestion is soundly rejected by Global Korea and her affiliates. He’s just a hireling, and his vision of crossovers and time-shares is too generous, too loose. There’s also an intern—“*illegal outsider re-useable friend (prop)*”—who goes by Jessica until USA Korea decides she’s Cindy. Either way, she’s no K. Interns are promiscuous, commingling with the corporate body for a limited time, unpaid. “Contemporary Slut!” Mexico Korea rages at Jessica/Cindy. “Every Body’s Got the Agenda!”



**I had to
let you Go.**



**It's not
your
Fault.**



**Don't Feel
Exemplized
It's Just Nature**

“I had to let you Go.” These words, spelled out in a 48-point typeface, occupy a whole page after Global Korea pledges: “I’m Gona Fire HER,,,,,”. “Don’t feel Exemplized,” the big words continue. “It’s just Nature.” Again, the language of human-resource management euphemizes otherness. The passive coinage “exemplized” emphasizes the helplessness of the recipient “you” and sticks out as a neologism to call attention to the relative ordinariness of these lines that broach difference. “It’s just Nature”: Singling out the other is the default of consciousness. When Global Korea and her affiliates natter mutual affirmations, the language is much weirder. Global regularly pronounces compound phrases where one plus one equals three, like “3rd/World-Class.” And she issues commands like “globalize at HER!” Tacking a preposition and an object on a verb that doesn’t take any is like stuffing a dozen bodies in a single identity. [k-corea 008.jpg] “Are you finding Position? It’s such a Hunt.” This early intertitle blurs the spatial and psychological parameters of navigating between harmony with others and assertion of self. Later, Mexico Korea vacillates: “I’m an Aquarium... I’m in Aquarium.” Used with the copula the indefinite article defines a thing by its likeness to other known things. “In” expresses location. Trecartin exploits the coincidence of homophony to elide the difference between an ontological position and a physical one. Just as the corporation’s abstraction of the body is returned partially to the concrete, identity sits somewhere between a state of mind and the location of the body. Mexico Korea, meanwhile, is neither an aquarium nor in one, which highlights language’s status as the zone for creating and confronting problems of positioning.

MAKING WORD

Trecartin’s writing responds to the internet, but it defies an assertion made by Kenneth Goldsmith, poet and founder of ubuweb, who wrote that flarf and conceptual poetry are the quintessential poetic responses to the digital age because they employ cut-and-paste techniques. Flarf originated about a decade ago, when a group of poets began taking sequences of random words that spammers included in messages to fool filters, entering them in search engines, copying results, and repeating until they reaped enough material to sculpt something that looked like a poem. The method tends to produce a pretty—and often funny—swirl of words that keeps skirting meaning:

heavy, greasy, dense and low, like
lethargic sea-green gardens
with a buzz overpowering, like
modern outdoor inbreeding.

You know you're Swiss when,
when foreign visitors ask to see your
chocolate factory, you answer,
"Why don't you and Hannibal Lecter

just kick out the jams?"
'Cause you know you got the chamber,
the chair,
and Fear Factor

(Excerpt from "[The Swiss Just Do Whatever](#)," by Sharon Meisner)

Goldsmith's conceptual poetry is pure appropriation. He moves chunks of text from one place to another, without editing or poeticizing:

D8 L THE NEW YORK TIMES TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2001
Metropolitan Forecast
today Less humid, sunshine
High 79. Noticeably less humid air will filter into the metropolitan region on.
Brisk winds from the northwest. High pressure building east from the Great Lakes
will promote mainly sunny skies. Daytime readings will peak in the lower 80's.

(Excerpt from "[Metropolitan Forecast](#)" by Kenneth Goldsmith)

Goldsmith is due great respect as a thinker and archivist, but his poetry is so sterile, it's unreadable. His method gives ordinary language the aura of an untouchable authority. He petrifies genre and meaning with it. Flarf eschews content, Goldsmith—style. Both reject traditional ideas of authorships by imitating the impersonality of machines. Trecartin keeps everything. His flamboyant use of the patterns of chat and ads and other types of cliché isn't a direct form of copying, but a concentration of a normal condition of language use: A speaker is obliged to use words that come from outside her—and can be understood by others—while making them her own at the moment of the utterance, in order to make it seem like the utterance comes from inside her. And *K-CoreaINC.K (Section A)* dramatizes that condition in dialogue.



The application of the script—which can be experienced on [Vimeo](#) and at PS1—brings it to life. The polyphony of voices woven into the text unravels in the voices of the actors who speak it, who all approach their task differently. Trecartin’s own performance as USA Korea makes the prosody implied by his punctuation audible. As North America Korea, Veronica Gelbaum’s delivery is uncertain and flat, which makes her lines extra uncanny, while Raul de Nieves owns the role of Mexico Korea and spins out Spanglish cadenzas. The jerky pastiche of the writing merges with the quick cuts and hot-potato camerawork, and the diversity of speech genres is raggedly matched by a diversity of shots, from the reality-show staging of Korea Inc.’s outdoor meeting to the vlog angle of USA Korea gazing out at viewers.

Domestic interiors expose the business talk as play-acting, and this element of childishness enhances the text's tensions by evoking a tween's hungry longing to belong. The Koreas look alike: blond wigs, white pancake makeup, white shirts. Furniture gets repeated, too, from the aggregation of Ikea lamps in the closing sequence with British Korea to the wood-veneer cupboards that greet visitors at "Any Ever." The gallery where *K-CoreaINC.K (Section A)* plays at PS1 mixes shower tiles and office furniture. Along the back wall, barstools alternate with planters filled with copy paper. Elsewhere the galleries are strewn with luggage and airplane seats as well as couches and kitchenware, blending the sedentary with global movement in an atmosphere of telepresence. Mass-market things become fluid and ephemeral, subject to exaggeration, misunderstanding, repetition and play. Their origins are indistinct or irrelevant, and the same things are used in other contexts by millions of people. They are like words.

NEW YORK

Flash Art

MAY JUNE 2011

RYAN TRECARTIN

Aimee Walleston

"Ryan is so ahead, Ryan is so fast, that I sometimes think that the past and the future collapse into the speed of stillness in his work." Speaking about the work of Ryan Trecartin, Klaus Biesenbach, Director of MoMA PS1, hints at not only what makes the artist a barometer of contemporary success, but also what makes Trecartin, who turns 30 this year, like no other young artist — producing manically paced videos with characters and narratives that encapsulate l'air du temps of current Western culture in all its insistent, schizophrenic exhibitionism. Two larger-scale exhibitions of his most recent series, a seven-piece film series titled "Any Ever" (2008-2010), will be on view simultaneously this summer, at MoMA PS1 and MOCA Miami (the exhibition began at The Power Plant in Toronto). As with almost all of Trecartin's work, the movies from "Any Ever" — which are imbued with a psychoactive narrative that explores careerism and market research, to name just a few themes — exist, in some form, online, which elicits the question of how a traveling museum exhibition allows these pieces to be born anew. "When a viewer navigates the movies online, the frame of the computer imposes itself on the actual reading of the works' content," says Trecartin. "In the museum setting, it's an opportunity for us to create a much more poetic frame." At PS1, the



RYAN TRECARTIN, Ready (Re'Search Wait'S), 2009-2010. Video still. Courtesy Elizabeth Dee, New York.

artist will collaborate once again with artist Lizzie Fitch (she is also a prominent performer in the films) to create "sculptural theaters." As the artist says, they "are almost like a package for the person to sit inside of and experience the movies. It's a frame that the person inhabits, and it creates a hum with the information that's in the movies."

As Trecartin first became widely known only five years ago (acquainted to many at the 2006 Whitney Biennial), these exhibitions almost seem like mid-career mini-retrospectives, mirroring the accelerated growth that seems to have determined the velocity of his career. Instead of distilling information to its finer points and alchemizing it into artistic prod-

uct, Trecartin's explorations convert information into logarithms; on his watch, the constant assault of image and advertising faced by contemporary humanity becomes even more complicated and cross-sectioned, not less. Trecartin's dialogue contains a degree of social critique: In Roamie View: History Enhancement (from the four-film cycle Re'Search Wait'S), 2009-10, a character played by Trecartin evaluates a work of art by stating: "It's about how there once was a time when cute people had to do very real things to make their situation work out." Presumably, we are no longer existing in that time, and Trecartin acknowledges this by casting, in another film within the series (The Re'Search), many young

actors from Orlando's dollar-and-a-dream gene pool of Disney child-star hopefuls. In future works, Trecartin hopes to spread even more tendrils into popular culture, including the possible use of reality television stars. "I want people to be attracted to riding the movies on the first read," says Trecartin adding, "Inserting handles of accessibility is something I push purposefully."

Any Ever was filmed over the course of two years in Miami, which makes its homecoming this summer significant. "In Miami, we were living in the sets that we were making. There were really no personal items in the house, just art movie props," says Trecartin. "All the rooms were being repainted, transformed and redressed weekly. It was a strange two years of living in a state of concentrated prop, set and script." The works highlight and mirror the changing face of Miami, which over the past ten years has added the identity of an art playground to its discursive character. "It was incredible to see what Trecartin produced in Miami over this time period, and how the house he used also transformed and adapted," says MOCA's Ruba Katrib. "I often drive by the house and can't help but wonder if the people who live there now have any idea what took place there before."

"Any Ever" opens June 19 at MoMA PS1 and June 24 at MOCA Miami.

THE ART ISSUE

STARRING

Kim Kardashian

Barbara Kruger

Pee-wee Herman

Daniel Libeskind

Johnny Knoxville

Juergen Teller

Ryan Trecartin

Salvador Dalí

(Warhol would be proud)

It's all about me

I mean you

I mean me





RYAN'S WEB

Cyberworld art star Ryan Trecartin makes over his band of merry collaborators—and takes Arthur Lubow inside his digital dreamscape.

Portfolio conceived by RYAN TRECARTIN, with postproduction by PASCAL DANGIN

If one day I meet an alien emissary, I can only hope he is as friendly and amusing as video artist Ryan Trecartin. At first glance a typical American hipster, with a little multicolored hoop in his right ear and a boyishly open face, Trecartin, 29, starts to talk, and you gradually realize that, no, he actually comes from another planet. Because that extraterrestrial sphere might be called Twentysomething, curators and critics have responded with rapt fascination to the dizzying signals that Trecartin is emitting. Last year he was the first recipient of two new art prizes: the New Artist of the Year Award, presented at the Guggenheim Museum, and the Jack Wolgin International Prize in the Fine Arts, awarded by Temple University in Philadelphia, with a stipend of \$150,000. Ali Subotnick, a curator at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, gave Trecartin his first one-man museum show in 2008. She says that when she initially saw his work, "it was a new language, basically. It was the first time I was looking at something in pop culture or art that was clearly from a generation after me."

Part of the fascination with Trecartin's art (which will be the subject of a solo show at MoMA PS1 next spring) is that it captures the feeling of information saturation in the Internet age. "Things are moving so quickly: You're getting e-mails and you're being chatted, and there's so many things going on at once," observes Lauren Cornell, an adjunct curator at the New Museum in New York, who included Trecartin in the "Younger Than Jesus" triennial last year and featured him in a group exhibition, "Free," that opened in October. "He's representing this hyper-simultaneous way that people are interacting these days."

For Cornell, who is 32, Trecartin's aesthetic—"People staring into the computer camera and performing, being hyperactive and narcissistic"—evokes YouTube. Yet while his style meshes with that of the other videos on the site (and most of his own work can be found there), the movie that established Trecartin's name, 2004's *A Family Finds Entertainment*, appeared before there was a YouTube. You could say that technology had to catch up to him. Chronologically, geographically, cognitively, and sexually, Trecartin might have been engineered to fill the artistic niche that the Internet revolution obligingly opened.

A Family Finds Entertainment was Trecartin's senior project at the

Rhode Island School of Design. In it he plays a black toothed, garishly made-up youth named Skippy who has locked himself in a bathroom and is cutting himself with a large knife while his friends alternately chat about taking their band on tour and plead with him to come out. He does emerge at last, only to run out of the house and be fatally struck by a car. But in this world nothing is irrevocable, and Skippy rouses himself from death to rejoin the party.

As in Trecartin's later films, the pacing is frenetic, the content is a palimpsest, and the hysterical storyline is mostly beside the point. What lingers is the mood of events happening too quickly and too simultaneously to be taken in fully. The 42-minute video is somewhat incomprehensible, strangely mesmerizing, and overstimulating to the point of exhaustion.

Trecartin made *A Family Finds Entertainment* with a band of RISD collaborators, most of whom have remained with him even as new people have joined up. They are the Mercury Theatre players to his cyberworld Orson Welles. His closest ally, Lizzie Fitch, is a sculptor he was introduced to during their freshman year. "When I first met her I thought she was insane," he says. "Then the first time we hung out, we bonded immediately." Soldered platonically, they have lived together—always with three or more other people—since 2001.

In June Trecartin took a two-year lease on a sprawling, grandly tacky Spanish Revival house in the Los Feliz section of Los Angeles; he and Fitch have bedrooms that face each other at the top of a wrought-iron staircase, and there are accommodations for four other housemates, along with rooms for studio space and editing facilities. As Trecartin gives me a tour, I am momentarily nonplussed to see a couple of syringes lying on the kitchen counter. Surely this isn't a revival of Warhol's Factory? No; Trecartin's drug of choice is Red Bull. "We've been doing B12 shots," he explains.

After graduating from RISD in 2004, Trecartin moved to New Orleans with a group of friends, including Fitch. Most of them earned a living by working in a Ninth Ward barbecue joint while he and Fitch tried to drum up an audience for *A Family Finds Entertainment*. On Friendster they looked for people who might like the movie; if an e-mailed overture elicited a positive reply, they snail-mailed a DVD. *continued on page 142*



Tiscarlin's chief collaborator, artist **LIZZIE FITCH**, wears Sally Hansen Airbrush Body Lingerie and Shiseido Perfect Rouge lipstick in Day tily. Oakley's plastic sunglasses; Ten Thousand Things' amber earrings; American Apparel's cotton jersey bra.



VERONICA GELBAUM, an artist and former RISD classmate of Treccanti's, has her eyebrows written in Stella Stay All Day Waterproof Liquid Eye Liner. Carolee's freshwater pearl earrings; watches from Movado, ESQ by Movado, and Ebel (worn as necklace); Dior's calfskin tote (inside plastic bag); Tocori's platinum and diamond ring; Chopard's palladium, resin, and lacquer pen; David Yurman's 18k yellow gold and silver earring (above pen); Jimmy Choo's napa leather and mesh shoes.

Face and Body Foundation; Banana Republic's leather belt (worn in hair); Abakus by Marsha Chun-Matsubara's zipper necklace; Yossi Harari's 18k yellow gold earrings; Oakley's metal sunglasses (on pants); suitcases—from left: Kumi, Samsonite, and Bric's.



even in that rusty dawn of the digital age, but sizable videos could be uploaded easily onto a website. Trecartin's work was of, by, and for the Internet—disseminated, as well as inspired, by it. One of the DVDs went to a group of art-school students in Cleveland, who showed it to visiting artist Sue de Beer, who was so impressed that she recommended it to curator and writer Rachel Greene, who in turn tracked Trecartin down and talked him up to several New York gallerists, including Elizabeth Dee. Dee became Trecartin's dealer.

This was social networking as it was meant to be—until a virulent slice of reality in the form of Hurricane Katrina intruded. The house where Trecartin and his friends were living was destroyed, and Trecartin and Fitch moved in with a group of lesbians in Fitch's hometown of Oberlin, Ohio. There they got the good news that *A Family Finds Entertainment* would be included in the 2006 Whitney Biennial. "I was more of a tech major, so I didn't really know what that meant, but Lizzie was a painting major, and she knew," Trecartin tells me. "She said, 'This means we're going to be able to make art.'"

These days it takes Trecartin about three years to produce a movie. A project begins with him struggling "to articulate certain sensations." He then collects phrases that he turns into sentences until he has a script. "But they look like poems because I don't know who's going to say what." He proceeds by imagining "an architectural space and voices and the way people move, and then characters, and how their hair would look when they said these lines, and how would it be different if it was a redhead who said it or a baby who said it, or if their hair changed from red to blond while they were saying it."

Long before there is a finished script, he starts shooting: "At a certain point I'm writing, shooting, and editing at the same time," he says. "It's creating a movie the way someone would create a more physical work of art, like a sculpture or a painting." He thinks of it as "sculpting a vibe" that is "actually unfolding and growing as it's being filmed in real time." Without computerized video technology, it couldn't happen. "I would never be a moviemaker if I had to use film. The magic in having it all be immediate is really, really special."

The perception that things happen simultaneously on multiple layers guides every aspect of his work. The stagey, exaggerated style of self-presentation that distinguishes his movie characters reflects the self-conscious mode of interaction Trecartin experiences with his friends. "I told my mom when *A Family Finds Entertainment* came out, 'Everyone my age is good at performing.'"

AS A CHILD, Trecartin thought he would become a performer. The older son of a steelworker (who today owns a scrap-metal business) and a homemaker-turned-teacher, he was born outside Houston but grew up in Ohio. He loved to make costumes and sets, and to dance and act with his friends. These homemade shows were inspired by the surrounding culture: music videos, TV programs, and movies. "Growing up in small towns, that's what I saw," he says. "I wasn't being taken to museums." The early Nineties witnessed the arrival of reality television as well as the Internet; the two strands spiraled together to form his artistic DNA. MTV, with its in-your-face cameras and quick-cut editing, also helped shape his aesthetic. Although critics have made analogies to the movies of Jack Smith, John Waters, and others, Trecartin typically learns of these people only after the connection has been brought to his attention.

Held back in first grade, he was placed in learning-disability classes. He still doesn't read much. He prefers to listen to friends talk about books they have read, just as he once met his course requirements by overhearing classmates' conversations about the assigned reading and writing papers that were his interpretations of their commentary. The static and linear format of a book turns him off. "I like hearing an interpretation of something more than the real thing," he says.

Having to repeat a grade placed him in the high school class of 2000. This was a great benefit, Trecartin says, because the impending new millennium motivated his teachers to talk repeatedly about what was coming. That formative experience may help account for his sweetly

Discussing sex and sexual identity, Trecartin says he is looking forward to a time when humans leave their genitals behind. "I see people as being what their personality is at the moment of expression," he explains. "I feel genitals hold us back a lot."

cockeyed approach to the universe: one eye focused on the future and the other on the present. (Forget about the past.) Discussing sex and sexual identity, for instance, he says he is looking forward to a time when humans leave their genitals behind. "I see people as being what their personality is at the moment of expression. I feel genitals hold us back a lot. They keep us connected to our older ideals of humanity." Without a fixed gender, one would be freer to adapt to changing situations. "I think it's really interesting that there are a lot of transies now who are in transition and want to be in transition—they don't want to be a man or a woman," he says approvingly. "The more nuanced we get, the more things people want to be."

Underlying these gender-bending theoretical notions is the biographical fact that Trecartin was once a gay boy growing up in the Midwest. Ever since the locked bathroom of his first movie, closets have featured prominently in his videos. ("I was in the closet, but I wasn't as far as my ideas went," he tells me.) But he is more eager to think about the role that closets might play in the future—allowing people to don different masks, as they now do online. "The idea of being something that's hid-

den and not letting other people know isn't only about sexual identity, and it isn't only negative. It can be fun to be hidden. It can be like wanting to work for an Internet company and pretending to be a 50-year-old freelancer when actually you're a 16-year-old kid getting these big checks. I feel being in a closet will become a choice rather than something you have to do."

Trecartin, who came of age during the onslaught of AIDS, watched television coverage of the epidemic. "For me it was really frightening," he recalls. "It turned me off from the whole idea of sex—'So sex means you die?' All those talk shows, and people are saying, 'My son has AIDS, and he deserves it because he's gay.' That was really scary." Cyberspace seemed safer, although that was risky too. "Junior and senior year, I wasn't connecting to the Internet, because I was afraid of viruses," he says. When I asked Fitch if that was true, she laughed and said, "For more than two years."

While assuring me that he has become less phobic and more open to physical contact, Trecartin is no less wary of foreclosing alternatives. The much noticed reluctance of twentysomethings to grow up and settle down may be linked to the freedom they indulge in online, where they can be all things to all people. In one of his movies, the word ALL-WAYS flashes with almost subliminal speed across the screen. For Trecartin and many of his peers, "all ways" is a much more appealing prospect than "always." It's about fluidity. Indeed, he reacts with mild exasperation when people relate the cross-dressing or role-playing in his movies to the ironic, campy impersonations of drag. "I want a feminine moment, but it has nothing to do with performing a role that is the opposite of my being a man," he says.

Trecartin believes technology is unleashing latent human potential. And he looks forward to a time when people no longer distinguish between their technology and their humanity. Characteristically, he is already half living that future. "I think technology is us, not something we invented," he says. "I think we are more psychic now because we have cell phones and you can look and see who's calling you. When people start seeing technology as us, as humanity, our whole idea of what existence is, is going to shift. I feel with these movies that you can explore all these nuances and details in the culture, so you can see them and not just let them wash over you."

In Trecartin's thinking, apparent opposites dwell on a common plane. "Things like high-low, in-out, even irony and sincerity, they all inhabit the same space," he says. "They don't exist in different logics." He views himself as a transitional figure. "It was so cool being young in the Nineties, with all these questions of 'What is real?' in the mainstream media," he says. "My generation is always wanting to talk about that transition and where it's taking us today. But people who totally grew up on the Internet, say after '88, are going to be looking at what we do in the same way I'm looking at drag and thinking, 'What are they doing? Or, I know what they're doing. But *why* are they doing it?'" ♦

ASHLAND MINES, a sound engineer who's appeared in Treccati's films, is decorated with Make Up For Ever Aqua Creams #11, #8, #20, and #22; Vex Clothing's red latex glove; LaCrosia's green leather glove; G.H. Bass & Co.'s leather shoe; Rothco's cotton onesie. For stores, prices, and more see Backstory, page 152.

iStockphoto™

Asif

0 Views

YET TOTALLY KNOWN



ARTFORUM

NOVEMBER 2010

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

Ryan Trecartin

MOCA PACIFIC DESIGN CENTER

The agitated camera work, gaudy palette, complete disavowal of intelligible narrative, emphasis on slippery models of beauty, desire, gender, and sexuality, and strategic use of lo-fi graphics evident in the seven videos on view in Ryan Trecartin's recent solo exhibition "Any Ever" are by now standard fare for the artist. But where previous viewing "environments"—for instance, *Sibling Topics (Section A)*, 2009, seen at New York's New Museum—recall the work of predecessors such as Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy in their emphasis on materiality, the installations in this show are far sparer and altogether more disquieting, hinting at a sharpening of Trecartin's concerns, and thus creating critical distance between the artist and his most obvious forebears.

Taken as a whole, the constellation on view at MOCA Pacific Design Center resembled nothing more than the vacant, affectless exterior and interior spaces of a house in a new middle-class subdivision, owned—or rented—by a recently postcollegiate professional: furnished quickly and only partially, perhaps on credit; rooms littered with incongruous groupings of objects purchased on a whim and always branded, tossed aside, and forgotten without a hint of wear—consumption compounded. The atmosphere of premeditated transience was established by scattershot assemblies of beds, tables, couches, exercise equipment, backpacks, handcuffs, heating lamps, and so on. Given the most basic, skeletal form, each room or set was so thin and brittle, it felt almost immaterial or, more apt, virtual, like the sociality of a chat room or a Twitter feed.

If Trecartin's environments felt like quickly assembled staging grounds for ad hoc performances, the videos they housed only animated and amplified that sense. The total installation—two floors, seven videos, five environments—was conceived as two corresponding halves and organized around a set of ambiguous allegorical concerns. Trecartin's actors dominate his videos, often facing the camera directly, chirping endlessly in voices synthesized into shrill digital tones. Every utterance is abbreviated as though a meaningless epithet carefully crafted to linger and impress for a moment, but no more, spoken with the understanding that someone is watching and listening: "I want to donate it to the fourth world. . . . Detroit probably needs it." "I am such an enigma." "Can I get a democracy sample?" "My body is a community." "The only person I hate more than myself is you, and you should take that as a major compliment." Content is secondary to style here, and style is dictated by a prevailing need for speed and brevity; each statement could be a text or a Facebook post, a hectic stream that is

only made more disorienting by the erratic camera work, the rapid-fire cutting from one "scene" to the next, and the occasional interruption by oversize text that recalls cover art for cheap bootleg mix CDs.

Trecartin's work derives its appeal from the artist's obviously intimate understanding of (and relentless desire to describe) the social networks that connect us in relation to the digital devices that have become extensions of our bodies, as well as the shared aesthetics these interrelated experiences have ushered into our collective consciousness. The artist's characters become themselves in anticipation of being seen, only to dissolve before becoming recognizable. In fact, Trecartin rarely lingers long enough on an image of anything—subject or object—for that entity to be consumed, let alone identified. This ability to convincingly channel, process, reconstitute, and critique social media, in all its optic, haptic, and social dimensions, is Trecartin's ongoing undertaking. In his video installations he has developed a synthesizing mechanism that finds its form in and around the still-emerging social aesthetics of the digital era, and this system acts as a powerful vacuum for both content and form, throwing the conditions of this most communal, heterogeneous, and democratic of social spaces into high critical relief.

—Christopher Bedford



Trecartin, *Any Ever*—*Installation View*—*MOCA Pacific Design Center* (Walt S). 009-10. © media, variable.

VOGUE

THE BODY

In an exciting range of current work, artists are finding inventive new ways to depict the figure in the contemporary world.

By Dodie Kazanjian.

The human figure is still art's indispensable subject. A century after Kandinsky made his historic leap into pure abstraction, artists young and old keep finding new ways to make figurative art—often with abstract elements as part of the package. In the last few years, the figurative impulse has been taking a very weird turn. Grotesque, disturbing, and highly eccentric in form and conception, the work of many artists in many different places shows a pre-rational intensity that leaves the real world far behind. These artists don't necessarily know one another or represent a movement yet, but they appear to share similar attitudes and influences. What you see here is a mini-exhibition of a trend that could be described as "eccentric figuration."

Massimiliano Gioni, director of special exhibitions at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, tells me he's been seeing the same tendency. (He has used the expression "hysterical realism.") "These artists are showing characters of a personal theater," says Gioni. "You could say it's the bastard child of Cindy Sherman and John Currin, a theater where the self doesn't matter anymore. You see not one but many selves."

As you might expect, the artists on these pages work in every conceivable medium. Gelitin, a four-man team of artist-provocateurs based in Vienna, has created a series of imaginary portraits in modeling clay. The Italian artist Roberto Cuoghi, who made a deceptively realistic portrait in wax of the megacollector Dakis Joannou, keeps turning his own life into an eccentric artwork: He spent several years "becoming" his father—he gained weight, wore his father's clothes, grew a beard, dyed his hair gray, and lived the same life his father was living. Cuoghi and his girlfriend now avoid quotidian distractions by

TELL IT LIKE IT IS

A still from *A Family Finds Entertainment*, 2004, an "anarchic, extreme, disjointed" work by Philadelphia-based video artist Ryan Trecartin.



A Family Finds Entertainment, 2004. Video. Courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Dee, NYC.

ECCENTRIC



living, in Milan, on Micronesian time, staying up all night and sleeping during the day. Nathalic Djurberg, originally from Sweden, tells darkly enchanted stories in stop-motion animation; her distorted clay figures are like characters in a macabre, absurdist fairy tale. Dana Schutz, bless her American heart, actually uses paint on canvas, but her characters tend to be fractured, self-devouring mutants, gorgeously painted monsters.

The sources of eccentric figuration range from Goya's *Caprichos* to tomorrow's scary headlines, from conceptual performance art to reality TV and cyberspace, from the late paintings of Philip Guston to Darth Vader to George Condo. "Figuration came to me primarily through comic books, cartoons, and movies," Thomas Houseago, a British sculptor of hulking, neo-primitive forms, tells me. "Those Beatles albums, like *Magical Mystery Tour*, created another space in my head." So did the late-Picasso show at the Tate in 1988, tribal African sculpture, Jacob Epstein, and prehistoric art. "I felt like I had all these friends, this lineage," he says, "this weird mix of high-low, low-high."

There's no doubt about it—high art and popular culture have merged. Jeffrey Deitch, the dealer and art impresario who has done as much as anyone to erase these boundaries, says the crossover "reflects the way the culture really is right now." Deitch's influential "Post Human" show in 1992 explored the cultural implications of plastic surgery, genetic engineering, and other modes of self-transformation. He's now at work on a show called "Carnival," which will deal with some of the same eccentric figurations that we see on these pages. "It's not expressionistic or psychological," he says. "And it's certainly not figuration that comes from observation of the model." The new work is straight from the artist's imagination, or what Kandinsky called "inner necessity." The stories it tells—and narrative is a central component here—are pure fiction, more disturbing than funny, highly theatrical, and sometimes even entertaining.

"It's about going into another reality," says Francesco Bonami, who is curating this year's Whitney Biennial and who's also been struck by the new figurative weirdness. "It's a reality that doesn't necessarily belong to reality, a kind of anti-digitalization. Our lives are shaped by the new digital technologies. The computer can generate so many forms that it's almost impossible to create your own style. These artists are going back to a more intimate dimension where they can find or rediscover boundaries and limits and create their own imaginary set of characters."



CASTING ABOUT

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: *Westworld*, 2009, by Francine Spiegel, who uses acrylic and airbrush on canvas; *Felt-S*, 2009, by Thomas Houseago, whose sculptures reference neo-primitive forms; and *Megas Dakis*, 2007, portraying collector Dakis Joannou, by Milan-based artist Roberto Cuoghi.



TURNING HEADS

FROM TOP: *Untitled*, 2008, by Polish painter Jakub Julian Ziolkowski; the anthropomorphic *cakepaast*, 2008, by Cassandra MacLeod; *Shaking, Cooking, Peeing*, 2009, by Dana Schutz.



Thomas Houseago will be in Bonami's Whitney Biennial, and so will George Condo, whose outrageously eccentric paintings have become newly relevant for this younger generation.

"People can't get away from people," as Condo puts it. "Guston broke the barrier of abstraction in our time and brought in this comedic, dark, ironic, idiotic, and heroic side of humanity. The thing that I look for in figurative painting is a feeling that the person walked onto the canvas, stood there for a moment, and will eventually walk off it. You're just catching them alive at that second."

Asked to name a young artist who's doing something on that order today, he says, "Ryan Trecartin's concept of figuration excites me. I like the insanity and the hysteria he puts into extremely commonplace situations. I think it mirrors the fear factor that runs rampant through the media and through people's lives, and keeps us on edge." Donna De Salvo, the Whitney's chief curator, is also high on Trecartin, whose work is already in the museum. "He has an understanding of narrative that is very much now," she says. "It's anarchic, extreme, disjointed—things don't really add up."

Trecartin, 28, is an American video artist whose characters, with gaudily painted faces, often argue and bicker in fragmented conversations—in cars, in kitchens, on the telephone. His work channels transgressive downtown performance art and reality TV. "I feel part of something that is larger than the art world," he tells me, "something that includes advertising and TV shows and journalism. A lot of people think that the new technologies are dehumanizing, but I feel like we're becoming more human and more connected. Everyone can participate in culture and change it. This eccentric work we're seeing now might seem creepy, but the world is full of creep, and it's good to show the creep and embrace it and see what productive, creative things can happen."

Jakub Julian Ziolkowski, from Poland, moves in the opposite direction from Trecartin. Instead of engaging with the technological present, his paintings well up from deep recesses of fantasy and folklore. Like most of this new crop of figurative artists, Ziolkowski devotes obsessive attention to craft and technique. By and large, these are not conceptual, post-studio artists acting as creative directors of a fabrication team. They do it themselves, in the studio.

As Massimiliano Gioni points out, we live in a figurative culture. "You look at magazines, you look at TV, and you're surrounded by faces. So much of what we see are faces that are Photoshopped or transformed in some way, and I think these artists are reacting to that." Mary Reid Kelley, fresh out of Yale's graduate school of art, writes and plays all the roles in her hypnotic black-and-white videos, which evoke past lives. In *Sadie, the Saddest Sadist*, wearing black, clownlike patches on her eyes and black lipstick and speaking in rhymed couplets, she portrays a munitions worker in World War I Britain, and also the sailor who gives her "the clap." "I think you could say," she tells me, "that, bad as things are today, we still have this basic human element of telling stories. Trying to imagine ourselves into other people's lives is evidence that all is not lost."

"The figure just never goes away," Donna De Salvo says. "It's a fundamental vehicle. Human identity is the one thing you can hold on to in a world that's spinning out of control." □



Ryan Trecartin:

Data Purge

by Jon Davies

The young American artist Ryan Trecartin's vertiginous performance, media and installation practice seeks to give physical form to the abstractions that govern life in the digital age. The structures and motifs of globalized, networked media and communications become characters, narratives and environments in his work.

Cyberculture is rewired through the fallible human body, with all its entropic, expressive energies and potential for physical and communicative breakdown. The result is a messy and excessive sensory bombardment that scrambles his viewers' processors and rewires their comprehension of cinematic storytelling, time and space. Consequently, Trecartin's work has commanded the art world's attention in a matter of a few short years.

Trecartin was born in 1981 in Webster, Texas, and raised in rural Ohio. He attended the Rhode Island School of Design,¹ where he studied video and animation, receiving his BFA in 2004. Relatively cheap to live in, packed with art students and close (but not too close) to New York, the city of Providence is known for being a hotbed of discipline-crossing DIY experimentation in terms of culture and community. It was here that Trecartin found his crew of like-minded creators, dubbed the XPPL (Experimental People Band). Upon graduation, Trecartin and friends

Ryan Trecartin
Popular S.ky (section ish),
2009. Still from an HD video.
Courtesy the artist and
Elizabeth Dee (New York).



Ryan Trecartin
I-Be Area, 2007. Still from a video. Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Dee (New York)

Trecartin's characters are digital data and they know it. Subject to being designed, rendered and transmitted like files, they can fluidly shift identity, form and affect at the press of a button – not to mention falling out of 'acting' and into 'being' at the drop of a hat.

Ryan Trecartin
K-Corps (NC: K (Section A)), 2006. Still from an HD video. Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Dee (New York)

coming-out story *A Family Finds Entertainment* (2004) to his suite of seven videos—the interconnected trilogy *K-Corps (NC: K (Section A))*, *Sibling Topics (Section A)* and *Popular Style (Section 10)* (all 2006), and the four-part series *Re-Search What's* (2008)—all showing together for the first time in *The Power Plant* exhibition 'Awk Eyes.' This theme spans the increasingly overlapping realms of biology and the digital, just as the successful cloning of ever more complex and sentient mammals parallels the culture of self-replication fostered by social media. YouTube, for example, provides a horbed for the generation of an infinite number of performances of the self, with even the most bare-bones confessional video blog inevitably constructed in dialogue with the dizzying archive of moving-image material to be found on the site. (And of course, each of these posted videos becomes the material for an infinite number of remixes and remakes, homages and perversions authored by millions of savvy autodidact editors.) Facebook for its part has honed the careful cultivation of one's public image into a digital art form, though again always in dialogue and in tension with other users and their whims (you can un-tag yourself from an embarrassing drunken photo, for example, but you can't delete it). The figure of the avatar in gaming, meanwhile, is so familiar in popular culture as to have lent its name to the colossal entertainment product that is James Cameron's 3D CGI film *Avatar* (2009).

Such a bloated corporate enterprise as Cameron's seems to be from an entirely different planet than the grainy pixelation of the online video realm where Trecartin's work has found a popular audience outside of the art world.⁶ Instead, Trecartin's spectacle is a kind of dry sci-fi: the future will be experienced through multiple web browsers and home editing-suite filters. *I-Be Area* (2007) remains perhaps the purest and most deserving of the term 'epic' among Trecartin's cinematic concoctions, with its dual protagonists of I-Be 1 and her clone I-Be 2 and its preoccupations with adoption and other non-biological forms of connection and reproduction. Trecartin's characters are digital data and they know it. Subject to being designed, rendered and transmitted like files, they can fluidly shift identity, form and affect at the press of a button—not to

decamped for New Orleans and then, following Hurricane Katrina, he has lived itinerantly, working in Philadelphia, Miami and Los Angeles, among other locations.

Trecartin captures the addled mental state of a generation raised by the Internet and the glut of information (though not necessarily knowledge) that it offers access to. Through his queer hysterics/theatrics and the hallucinatory digital manipulation of every image, object, space, and sound on-screen, Trecartin's work is a seething stew of the bodily, the discursive and the virtual. He transforms the space of the screen into that of the computer desktop with hundreds of windows open, each addressing you with a character high on what writer Wayne Koestenbaum has succinctly called "connectivity" and "morphability."

With seemingly no history to speak of, Trecartin's attention-seeking characters spout a painfully 'contemporary' dialogue composed of pop-culture references, trendy buzz-words, harebrained theories, talk-show confessions, and text-message shorthand. This sub-cultural

meta-language might sound nonsensical at first, but on closer inspection it reveals itself as a witty and incisive (if absurdly circuitous) diatribe. Working in an improvisational performance tradition with mostly non-professional actors, friends and acquaintances of all ages, genders and races,⁷ Trecartin writes a script but lets his performers play within it.

The characters' rapid-fire sentences (or fragments thereof) are more often than not punctuated with an act of physical destruction: Bodies plunge through walls, smash picture frames (or bed frames) or swing sledgehammers through windows. This violent body language amplifies each spoken word through seemingly nihilistic gestures, but only when furniture ever breaks, not human beings.⁸ Trecartin's mash-up of a script is frequently delivered in an exaggerated, neo-Valley Girl tone distilled from the likes of Paris Hilton and Brinney Spears. Similarly, the cadences and beats of their frenetic speech—and the pauses for breath and accentuation in between—are dislodged from rhetorical logic. This inhuman, synthetic-sounding organization of verbal language is further intensified by Trecartin's digital manipulation of many of the voices and statements in post-production.⁹ The most punchy Trecartin sequences—the ones that really stick—use montage to create rhythm and something approaching sense from his mind-melting flow of audio-visual content.

Trecartin has maintained a fascination with cloning and the multiplication of identity throughout his multifarious projects, from the cracked



Ryan Trecartin
 Installation view: 'The Generational Younger Than Jesus', New Museum (New York), 2009. Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Dee (New York)



Ryan Trecartin
Popular S.K.Y. (section nh)
2009. Still from an HD video.
Courtesy the artist and
Elizabeth Dee (New York)

mention falling out of 'acting' and into 'being' at the drop of a hat. This ostensibly liberating power of pure mutability carries a dark undercurrent, with everyone screaming over each other to be heard, and no stable home or selfhood. These concerns with family and biology are resurrected in *Sibling Topics* (Section A), which begins with a character named Carryon Ova—who busts a digitally-distended, constantly mutating pregnant belly—addressing her quadruplet daughters Ceader, Britt, Adobe, and Deno (all played by Trecartin, all of their subjectivities blurred).

K-Corra INC. K (Section A) finds Trecartin portraying just one of dozens of near-identical 'K-Coreas' from all over the world attending an endless company meeting. Each is identifiable primarily by their mock-ethnic accent since they share the same blonde wig, glasses and business-casual women's wear (all part and parcel of their collectively performed whiteness and womanhood, which Trecartin calls "work-face"). Their Sarah Palinesque style and hyperbolic pronouncements, mass-produced to become a kind of uniform for the jet-setting businesswoman of today, takes on added menace with the quip: "rethinking the word humanity as an object with a goal." Here Trecartin finds a delicious corporeal form for the unfettered global traffic of capitalism: each is an "offshore identity storage unit"—certainly nothing more human than that—enacting a hyped-up version of the corporate bump and grind and always at risk of being made redundant by their formidable lady-boss, Global Korea.³ A climactic sequence features an airplane full of the Koreas screeching and getting drunk, eventually setting a stewardess—who resembles more of a Leigh Bowery creation than Karen Black in *Airplane-on fire*. (The airplane is an anachronism: none of these characters actually require hulking masses of steel to travel through space and time, just willpower.) The fuselage set we see is a homemade construct installed in someone's house, with the 'real' outside world visible through the back windows—nothing is seamless.

It is important to point out here that Trecartin always works collaboratively—most committedly and from the very beginning with Lizzie Fitch—and returns with the same troupe of performers from one project to the next, though each is inevitably expanded with people met or found along the way. His projects register this ad hoc community's impulses towards both creation and destruction, as characters, sculptures, paintings, and architectures are built up only to be destroyed in the cathartic, even orgiastic ritual that is the shooting process. (Arguably this

Ryan Trecartin
Popular S.K.Y. (section nh)
2009. Still from an HD video.
Courtesy the artist and
Elizabeth Dee (New York)



libidinal dimension casts the equally energy-consuming but solitary work of editing—an intensive, monomaniacal process that Trecartin claims is fuelled by junky microwave meals—as a masturbatory one.)

While much ink has been devoted to Trecartin and his work, very few critics have described his non-linear experimental narratives in detail, unless quoting directly from the artist. The speed and simultaneity of the plot threads, sudden transformations of the characters, fluidity of time and space, and shrill mode of delivery make the narrative structures confusingly rhizomatic and abstruse, tough to take a step back from and summarize beyond the subjective pleasure and terror-filled experience of them.⁴ This intense degree of abstraction mirrors the impossible-to-grasp paroxysms in the global economy—particularly the recent 'crunch' that seemed like it might doom us all to eating foraged twigs and berries—and the increased immateriality of credit and of finance. Increasingly difficult to comprehend too are the changes to our genetics as technologies become more and more intricate and the once-unimaginable becomes real. Digital video—amplified through animation/cgi technologies—is in a unique position to similarly make the imaginary tangible and manifest: what physical bodies won't do, pixel-tweaking can.

However, it is remarkable just what these bodies can do, particularly Trecartin's athletic shape-shifting, which has seen him transform into dozens of distinct characters through costumes and make-up, not

to mention tanning; Shin, Amerisha, Pasta—their names part Warhol superstar, part Walmart. While the models of identity proposed in Trecartin's videos feel radically new, they fall into the legacy of queer underground film and performance of figures like Jack Smith and John Waters (frequently name-checked in writing on Trecartin) who advocated perverse dress-up; striking an exaggerated pose and rabid acting-out as flaming forms of self-fashioning and self-projection.⁵ In 'Any Ever', the possibility for imaginative identity construction is also opened up for viewers: As people walk through the labyrinth of distinct 'containers' that Trecartin will create at The Power Plant, they will be confronted with non-sequential, open-ended and polyphonic cinematic realities that, in Trecartin's mind, are to be 'edited' by viewers into some semblance of cohesion depending on where and how they direct their attention. Each of these framing environments will take on another form—board room, airplane, etc.—echoing how the settings and spaces in the videos themselves are of decidedly unstable materiality, constantly shifting in terms of what worlds they enclose—and what possibilities they present.

Jon Davies is a widely published writer, particularly on film and video, the co-curator of the exhibition 'Ryan Trecartin: Any Ever' with Senior Curator of Programs Helena Reckitt, and the Assistant Curator of Public Programs at The Power Plant.

1. The Royal Albert School of Design also sponsored the collective Paper Riot, which saw Trecartin, main judge and eye-popping son of fashion Peter Dinklage, Sara's 16-year-old niece, and a group of other artists, in high school, be assigned and made up costumes and sets, shooting still and moving picture made of their own.

2. The great or 'total' One never got written. Kevin McQuary described them as "the American particularly ending example to the demographic diversity of the video work."

3. Characters in Trecartin's work aren't controlled by their physical bodies, but instead can move easily from somebody to another. This, stated in his own words, "my bodies can be treated as post-personas (Lynch)".

4. In a February 2009 piece on Trecartin in *The New York Times*, the New Museum's Manoharini Ghose commented, "It's as if Trecartin is taking his characters' bodies that he further edits himself."

5. Before moving to such venues as the Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (1991) and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1993).

6. Indeed, Trecartin was first "discovered" in 2006, according to Dennis Cooper in *A Museum*, which introduced a student at the Cleveland Institute of Art shared writing with him as being a link to what was called 'Trecartin & Family Project'.

7. Entertainment on the long forgotten scale (relating to a film festival, which the film festival shared with many film festival director Rachel Greene, who is now based in the gallery).

8. In McQuary's words, "The American-orientated culture-orientations and explicit materialities established an individual form speaking to themselves."

9. I can't help but reference the independence from Neil LaBute, John Waters, and Peter Jackson, the American 'murders' and assassinations' in 'Vegetarian assassinations'.

10. In the Summer 2009 issue of *Artforum*, Rosalind Wiseman wrote, "All I can do is generate about this thing and pass it off with a passing, almost presciently passing grin as the gesture of an outsider's tourist, gawking at a spectacle he doesn't fully understand or dynamite. I don't wait to see it again." (p. 100).

11. Northrup says, "Basically, in Trecartin's work, the body is a site of personal and social negotiation, you aren't looking at a body, you're looking at a body that is a site of negotiation." (p. 100).

The New York Times

Art Made at the Speed of the Internet: Don't Say 'Geek'; Say 'Collaborator'

By RANDY KENNEDY

When Robert Rauschenberg and a buttoned-down Bell Labs engineer named Billy Kluver began thinking, in the mid-1960s, about ways that people from the world of technology could help artists make art, Mr. Kluver surveyed the mighty gulf between the two groups and almost thought better of the idea. "I was scared," he said once in an interview. "The amazing thing was that it's possible for artists and scientists to talk together at all."

Nearly half a century after that influential experiment, one in the same spirit, though crazily compressed into a single day, was taking place on Friday in a chilly loft office on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. An artist and a technical whiz sat together at a long table, their faces made silvery by the glow from their laptops — the only tools they had brought, besides their digital cameras. Anyone unfamiliar with the pair — Evan Roth, a kind of Web-centric graffiti artist, and Matt Mullenweg, a creator of the popular blogging platform WordPress — would have had to listen a long time to figure out which one came from which world. They free-associated at Web speed, their conversation sprinkled with things like hex values, detection algorithms and executable code.

"Let's try to stay away from the Web-nerdy stuff," Mr. Mullenweg, 26, warned, as Mr. Roth, 32, trolling for help on Twitter, was compiling

video clips for the work of art they had conceived that morning.

The two were part of Seven on Seven, a project conceived by Rhizome, the new-media art organization in New York, to match seven artists with seven "technologists," a Google engineer and an early Facebook developer among them. The pairs were given a reality-show-era deadline of 24 hours in which to sit together in rooms across Manhattan and come up with creations to present on Saturday to an audience at the New Museum, where Rhizome is based.

Whether the brainchildren of these collaborations ended up feeling more like apps or like art was up to the teams, and the distinction didn't seem to matter to artists nearly as much as it might have even 14 years ago, when Rhizome was founded to explore the emerging field of Web-based art, said Lauren Cornell, the organization's executive director.

But Ms. Cornell, who created the team-up project along with some of her tech-world board members and supporters, added that even now, after decades of increasing overlap between art and technology, the idea remained daunting to many of the artists and Web people she approached. "This was something we went into with the knowledge that it was an experiment and that it could end up being a failure," she said. "A lot of people I called to see if they were interested, people I know — friends of mine — didn't even get back to me."

More than 150 people turned out for the New Museum presentation, some paying as much as \$350 for tickets. With a couple of exceptions what they saw were not objects but ideas — some funny and entertaining, some deadly serious — situated at the fertile nexus where social networking and the Web's data-gathering power is providing artists and scientists with immense piles of raw material about society and psychology.

Joshua Schachter, a software engineer at Google, and Monica Narula, an artist from New Delhi, came up with a rough plan to convert private guilt into charitable giving, allowing Internet users collectively to assign dollar values to various misdeeds so that guilt might be assuaged through donations. (On Friday the team paid Web users small amounts to help come up with categories of misbehavior and attendant fines. They arrived at \$47 for forgetting one's mother's birthday, for example, and \$20 for "being mad at my spouse because of a dream.")



David Karp, left, and Ryan Trecartin discuss their project at the Seven on Seven presentation at the New Museum on Saturday.

THE Arts

The New York Times

Art Made At Speed Of Internet

From First Arts Page

The artist Ryan Trecartin and David Karp, a creator of the short-form blogging platform Tumblr, came up with a streaming video site that feels like plugging YouTube directly into the cerebral cortex. The artist Kristin Lucas and Andrew Kortina, who builds social Web applications, proposed a way for people to exchange identities — in essence, to take a break from themselves — via Twitter. Ayah Bdeir, an engineer and designer, and Tauba Auerbach, her artist collaborator, made a randomly moving moiré-pattern sculpture designed to freeze when a viewer enters the room, leaving its actions when unwatched a mystery.

Can creativity and Web power solve the umbrella crisis?

Jeff Hammerbacher, a former Facebook engineer, and Aaron Koblin, an artist specializing in data visualization, theorized about Wiki ways to improve the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. And Hillary Mason, a computer scientist, and Marc André Robinson, a sculptor, both intrigued by trying to change the culture of disposable goods in the United States, took on the “cheap umbrella issue” in New York. They created a prototype for an umbrella-sharing service in which the umbrellas would record their own histories, using embedded cameras and GPS.

Mr. Roth and Mr. Mullenweg, who like the other teams were not allowed to confer before meeting — they had a brief Skype chat only to say hello — arrived Friday morning at the offices of Kickstarter, a Web fund-raising service, which had loaned its spare, tin-ceilinged back room as a workspace. Both men knew they had a resource that most artists throughout history could only envy: a potential audience of 12 million people, the number who use WordPress to create blogs, which Mr. Mullenweg

could tap into as easily as tapping his keyboard.

Their idea, one that might seem a little esoteric to the non-blogging populace but that drew a hearty round of applause when introduced on Saturday, was to create a new function on WordPress called “Surprise Me. (Fun-mode),” so that when a blogger hits the publish button — an act that Mr. Roth described as a moment of great existential loneliness, “like sending the bottle out to sea” — a random congratulatory video suddenly fills the screen. (The example they showed on a large screen was a heartwarming slow-clap locker-room clip from the movie “Hoosiers.” Mr. Mullenweg and Mr. Roth also collected feel-good video from “The Price Is Right,” “American Idol” and the Beijing Olympics.)

They described their creation as an “emotional plug-in,” a virtual artwork to celebrate the “sacred act of publishing,” which the Web has transformed as fundamentally as Gutenberg did and which is, in turn, transforming society. After some highly anticlimactic code programming by Mr. Mullenweg and a lot of cackling by Mr. Roth, who sat with his earphones in, compiling clips — “there’s way too much happiness on the Web,” he said at one point — the two finished their project at 3:30 Saturday morning and introduced it on WordPress, announcing its existence by blog, mostly to users in Europe and on the Indian subcontinent, who were awake.

By Sunday afternoon New York time, more than 11,000 people had decided to turn on the “surprise me” feature and experience some randomized positive-reinforcement art, a response that heartened its creators. Though Mr. Mullenweg, in perhaps his first professional encounter with art critics, noted worriedly that 563 of those people had already decided to turn the art off.

“The opt-out rate,” he said, recasting the age-old language of creative rejection in the precise words of the technologist, “is higher than I would like.”

ARTFORUM

SUMMER 2009

I N T E R N A T I O N A L



Situation Hacker

WAYNE KOESTENBAUM on the art of Ryan Trecartin



This page: Ryan Trecartin, *Re'Search Wait'S (Edlt 1: Missing Re'Search Corruption Budget)*, 2009, stills from a color video, 68 minutes. Opposite page: Ryan Trecartin, *A Family Finds Entertainment*, 2004, still from a color video, 41 minutes 12 seconds.

IMAGINE SLASHER FILMS WITHOUT BLOOD; porn without nudity; the Sistine Chapel without God; the New York Stock Exchange without capital. Pretend that Hieronymus Bosch's intermeshed figures could text. Ryan Trecartin's videos depict a vertiginous world I'm barely stable enough to describe. Watching them, I face the identity-flux of Internet existence: surfing-as-dwelling. Images evaporate, bleed, spill, metamorphose, and explode. Through frenetic pacing, rapid cuts, and destabilizing overlaps between representational planes (3-D turns into 2-D and then into 5-D), Trecartin violently repositions our chakras. Digitally virtuoso, his work excites me but also causes stomach cramps. I'm somatizing. But I'm also trying to concentrate.

Trecartin, born in Texas (a trace of drawl is a vocal leitmotif of his videos), broke into the art world with *A Family Finds Entertainment* in 2004, the year he graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design. (The art world: Does Trecartin need it?) Then, in 2006, came the seven-minute-long video (*Tommy Chat Just E-mailed Me.*) and the feature-length *I-Be Area*, both available on YouTube and UbuWeb. In the "Younger than Jesus" exhibition, at New York's New Museum until July 5, Trecartin unveiled installments of his latest epic, composed of three interconnected, modular psychodramas: *Sibling Topics (Section A)*, *K-Corea INC. K (Section A)*, and *Re'Search Wait'S (Edit*

1: Missing Re'Search Corruption Budget), all 2009. (The videos are also on display this summer, with a larger installation, at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia.) Trecartin, who writes, directs, and performs in his videos, works closely with fellow RISD alum Lizzie Fitch. She, too, stars in the videos; she also collaborates on sets and costumes and on the sculptural installations accompanying the films. (In the New Museum trilogy, Rhett LaRue is another credited collaborator; he handles the 3-D animations.) Like Andy Warhol, Jack Smith, John Waters, the Maysles brothers, and the brothers Kuchar, Trecartin capitalizes on a quarry of gifted, histrionic associates and discoveries—charismatic screen presences include Veronica Gelbaum, Courtney Malick, Telfar Clemens, and Alison Powell. Of all the actors, Trecartin might be my favorite: His neo-brainy antics, though sui generis, have the acerbic pizzazz of Ondine, Mickey Rooney, "Little" Edie Bouvier Beale, Sacha Baron Cohen, Alex Bag, and Amy Sedaris. (Lists, lists! Can't live without them.) Trecartin's mind may be as iconoclastic as Noam Chomsky's, but his mien is as juvenile as Jackie Coogan's. Trecartin is an adorable, demented trickster who never stops aiming twisted affect at the camera.

In new sculptural works, such as *The Aboutthing (in the air)* and *Now, in the Sunroom* (both 2009), Trecartin and Fitch show tableaux of intertwined, evocative objects, like a dream's *disjecta membra* or props from a trashed film studio: swimming pool, mannequins in meltdown, luggage thrown helter-skelter. The sculpture has considerable charm, ambition, and suggestiveness, but my heart is in the videos, which I'd rather see at home than in a museum or gallery, if only because the



Trecartin's mind may be as iconoclastic as Noam Chomsky's, but his mien is as juvenile as Jackie Coogan's. Trecartin is an adorable, demented trickster who never stops aiming twisted affect at the camera.

videos demand time and concentration. After several viewings, I still can't keep track of the personalities; they zap in and out, like extraterrestrial desiderata on interactive flying saucers.

I want to ride Trecartin's flying saucers, but I'm also afraid of them. His cosmos, not a tranquilizer, presents a terror-spiked forecast. Of apocalypse-as-party. Of psychological evisceration as spiritual exuberance. Of "being-at-home" as whirling-dervish danceteria. All I can do is generalize about this world and point to it with a yearning, stumped pleasure; my pointing finger is the gesture of an outsider, a tourist, gawking at a radioactive carnival I can't domesticate or quarantine. I don't want to sell or explain Trecartin. Nor do I wish to over-emphasize the differences among his various works, all recently produced. I interpret them as evolving mutations of a single worldview, a visual and verbal idiom I take the risk of essentializing as "Trecartinese" (the mother tongue of Trecartinesia). What follows is a subjective survey of his idiom's idiosyncracies.

IN TRECARTIN'S UNIVERSE, a singular personality style dominates: gregarious, theatrical, spewing. Faces are painted, often with marks suggesting wounds, bandages, plastic surgery, or racial disguise. Bodies are canvases for abstract paintings, with the subversive spirit of Yves Klein

and Carolee Schneemann, and the chromatic punch of Hans Hofmann and Mary Heilmann. The stakes of Trecartin's (and Fitch's) painterly gestures are etherealization disguised as materialization: turn burdensome bodies into animated arrows, and lift the person from the doldrums of humanness by upgrading unmarked skin into brightly apotropaic abstraction.

Trecartin's world is unashamedly faggy. He digitally alters voices—pitch raised or lowered—to obscure gender. You can squeak or boom, pipe or bellow: Vocal transplants occur, instantaneously. "Ethnic" talk-idioms slide the speaker outside identity categories into spiky, gratifying hipness. Conversation succumbs to monologue: Everyone rants, or issues stinging declarations—diverse idiolects remixed into philosophical investigations. (One character in *I-Be Area* ventures a thought experiment that Ludwig Wittgenstein could have accommodated in his *Remarks on Colour*: "I think we should show him the color yellow for a year, and then the next year only the color green. And see if it makes him different or more interesting or cooler than everyone else his age. I think in high school it will give him the razor's edge.") Some players seem high, but the real drug is connectivity, morphability. Orgasm is beside the point. The kids would rather talk; their hands clutch phantom cell phones. It's surprising that for a social world as based in visual overstimulation as Trecartin's, language retains its place as identity-marker and identity-transfuser: *Talk* (chatter, rant, monologue) remains the plasma through which personality affirms its right to die and to live.

Players tease and set fire to one another—but nonlethally. Here you can delete frenemies. You can cut and paste them.

With digital sleight of hand, you can lobotomize or Drano them. And they reappear! Actions seem violent, but even if you've been evaporated by a sidekick's superior will, you can recolonize yourself on another atoll. (In *K-Corea INC. K*, a commanding transgender character named Global Korea has the power—through incongruous cock-flash under short skirt, and through audacious stewardess-CEO-speak—to shame her fellow travelers into nonexistence.) Deleuze and Guattari described this hypersphere, but they didn't make it seem fun. Trecartin's gang blisses out on rhizomatic existence. Books are dead. Books are "cute" relics. In *Re'Search Wait'S*, one of Trecartin's characters, a "spaz" named J. J. Check, thinks it would be cute to rewrite the US Constitution. Every time the word *people* or *humanity* appears, he replaces it with *situations*; and every time *God* appears, he substitutes *The Internet*. J. J.'s tenancy on-screen is temporary; he is a pit stop between other personalities—a puerile turnstile, like Linda Blair in *The Exorcist*, but with an ego purchased at the Container Store.

In Trecartin's world, there are no old people and only a few over thirty. Fathers have vanished: Good-bye to patriarchy. The Moms may be several, lesbian, and kindly, but in *I-Be Area*, Trecartin himself assumes the role of a psycho Mom, practical and chic as Doris Day interfacing with Lance Loud. (Is *I-Be Area* the transitional arena—of flux and play—in which "I" am "free" to "be"? Or is it the cordoned-off, always-already-under-surveillance area in which the "I" is quarantined,

sequestered for observation—the "I" led on a wild-goose chase through the labyrinth of its own putative freedom?) The "Mom" is a major category in Trecartin's cosmos: Anyone's eligible. In this drag matriarchy, body alteration abounds, some of it recidivist, as scary as Elsa Lanchester's Bride of Frankenstein. In *Sibling Topics*, one of Trecartin's gender-transitional characters proudly flashes his breast-reduction surgery scars. If you're not pregnant, you can morph your belly, anyway, to appear knocked up. All genders in Trecartinesia are created equal, but "Mom" still has an underground sway, like Erda or Fricka in Wagner's Ring. Lacan's lingo, if summoned, could cast its complicated, pervy light on Trecartin's Mom-locus, its neo-Oedipal flora and fauna.

DON'T EXPECT OLD-SCHOOL RELICS like penises or vaginas. Don't expect titillation. Pollution, pesticides, hormones, and waste-management crises have changed human anatomy: Every year, the distance between a man's wiener and butthole is shrinking. Good riddance to cocksurenness. Economies crash; decorators pin cash, like Mardi Gras tinsel, to circulating fans. Aspirants seize

It's surprising that for a social world as based in visual overstimulation as Trecartin's, language retains its place as identity marker and identity transfuser.



you assert eminence through body paint, gesture, and dialogue. And through concision. No one is tedious; players—as we learn in *Sibling Topics*—are "post-family and prehotel" and therefore always auditioning for Presence. Audition, or rehearsal, is a perpetually stimulated and vigilant state of being. Trecartin himself, in real life, is part of a musical group (XPPL [the Experimental People Band]); the chummy clubhouse atmosphere of his videos reminds me of *The Monkees* and *The Partridge Family*. In both situation comedies, "life" and "fiction" poached off each other. The tour bus ruled the land. The tour bus, a mobile Valhalla, pacified generational wars with a saccharine score. There's

crazy new names, like household products or security codes: Pasta, Twi-Key, Sen-Teen, Adobe, Wait, Able. Parents abandon children: Abandonment is the new sexy sine qua non. Being a foundling doesn't preclude having a Mom in tow. Trecartin and his muses hang out in a house, *unheimlich gemütlich* as the homes in *Eraserhead*, *Carrie*, *Blue Velvet*, *Notorious*, and *Naked*. In Trecartin's zone, you needn't buy or rent property—just squat. Trash the place; repaint it, upload it, hit "Send." You never sleep and are never sleepy, unless your voice gets slowed down by QuickTime or some other software I don't know the name of. Slash your neck with paint. Separate your head from your body to downplay the dull genitals. Surgically mark your neck with a horizontal pre-della or with a pseudo-tracheotomy scar—as if warming up for decapitation, or posthumously recovering from it. As far as I can judge, the most conspicuous and telling body paint, in several videos, occurs on the neck. Voice is the anxiety point, and therefore the painterly—the stroke, the slash, the cut, the mark—concentrates its supposedly *retardataire* energies on the very place where orality and literacy stage their war of the worlds.

One character turns into another by discovering an alter, avatar, or replica. Personality is always transitioning: One identity devours the next in line. Spongy egos slide into one another, like transgender, transracial part-objects glomming on to embryonic epistemes. You can efficiently dis anyone. Dissing—claiming turf—happens instantly and cleanly. In

K-Corea INC. K, the dominatrix-mogul Global Korea sends out this gnomic stinger: "Who the fuck is that baby shit-talker? That's not one of *my* condiments." Following the ontology of *Paris Is Burning*, Trecartin sets in play a black-inflected drag system of identity manufacture and parade, complete with couture-terrorized *écoles* and slum-Situationist ateliers, or sensibility workshops run by sacerdotal "mothers" and staffed by acolyte "children" who dwell in deep danger of being branded as "unreal." Reality, in Trecartin's multi-racial social bubble, derives from personality assertion;



Opposite page: View of "Younger than Jesus," 2009, New Museum, New York. Ryan Trecartin, untitled, 2009. This page: Ryan Trecartin, *K-Corea INC. K (Section A)*, 2009, stills from a color video, 31 minutes 20 seconds.



This page: Ryan Trecartin,
Sibling Topics (Section A),
2009, stills from a color
video, 50 minutes. Opposite
page: Ryan Trecartin, *I-Be
Area*, 2007, still from a color
video, 108 minutes.

comfort to be found in occupying the niche—the area, the container, the Winnicottian holding environment—of a TV-show-length module, an *informal, a homeschooled band*. *The Manson Family and the Partridge Family* and *All in the Family* and the Jackson 5 and Sly and the Family Stone have found, in Trecartin's kinship regime, an heir who questions the value of "family" while reupholstering it.

In Trecartin's postsexual world, everyone speaks in a hodgepodge of accents—a composite. (I say *postsexual* because there's hardly an allusion to fuck-

ing in the entire Trecartin oeuvre.) Dialects are his acrylics. Spanglish. Country and western. Hip-hop. Sotheby's. Secretarial. Subcontinental, any continent. Dallas. Instead of "yes," say "yay-us." His accents refer to class and attitude as much as to region or ethnicity. The point of an accent seems to be its potential placelessness—its telegraphic way of marking the site where recognizability gets bamboozled. Trecartin has a handsome mouthful of teeth and he puts them to good use. He paints them—green? blue? silver?—and sometimes supplements them with false teeth; he expands the mouth, which can barely contain the verbal torrent. His language shatters paradigms: In Trecartin's scripts (the lines are apparently not improvised), everyone speaks in tidbits, and these koans are a new form of poetry, laced with social critique and unclassifiable esprit. He juxtaposes lancing phrases; he sutures vernaculars. Utterances grow exciting when repeated and tidbitized, or when they are offered as propositions or dares rather than as factual statements. "Put your breasts back on." "I want a idea landfill." "I define myself as a situation hacker." "Fuck cookies." "I can't wait till the Internet declares its independence." "It reminds me of the future." "I don't know a single company that's experimental enough for me." "Am I overexisting, or am I overexisting?" "I never say 'they.' I say 'us' or 'we.'" "I love being in places that mean nothing to me." "I'm finally just an 'as if.'" "She's a toxic bisexual wearing unstable flip-flops." Occasional references to "my personal really concise pussy" leave me happy yet puzzled: In *Re'Search Wait'S*, Trecartin's character, Wait, who can't cope with being gainfully employed, says, "My personal really concise pussy is creating a very inner monologue that I'm not going to share with you as I become dynamic." "J. J., check it," the sharp-souled, diminutive performer Alison Powell squeals. (Her screen name is Roamie, and she stars in an interlude called "A Roamie Connect History Enhancements," nested in *Re'Search Wait'S*.) I've been repeating her phrase, "J. J., check it," compulsively. What brave new world will interpellate me if I intone this stolen mantra? J. J. is a charming "retard." Cognitive lag or interruption is no stigma for Trecartin's personae.

Walter Benjamin drew a distinction between *concentration* and *distraction*. Distraction meant falling prey to false

consciousness. Concentration meant rising to revolutionary art's—or history's—challenge. Occasions for concentration were fading, Benjamin feared. (Ghoulishly, in German, one word, *Konzentration*, sometimes indicates both concentration camp [*Konzentrationslager*] and mental concentration; the ability to concentrate, in Benjamin's 1940 "Baudelaire" essay, is *Konzentrationsvermögen*.) Benjamin wanted us to concentrate—to perform a mental deliberation akin to what art historian Michael Fried (following Diderot) has described as "absorption." (A figure in a painting should ignore the viewer and remain absorbed



in an activity, whether reading, praying, sewing, or sleeping.) Paradox: *Trecartin's characters concentrate on distraction*. They exercise the right to honor their own skittishness—but "distraction" now wears the guise of transformation, mutability. Being distractible (ADD?) intensifies consciousness. And the intensification of consciousness (even if this intensification poses as a dilution, evaporation, or deliquescence of knowingness) is one goal of any art I stand behind.

PLAYING DRESS-UP is philosophical boot camp. That's why Cindy Sherman's figments, whether glamorous or abject, belong with Trecartin's people. So do Nan Goldin's citizens. Like Goldin, Trecartin focuses on

purgatories—depressed or zippy coteries held together by hedonistic color and the luridness of interpersonal contact revved to the breaking point. And yet Goldin's and Sherman's photographs seem comfortingly stable and monumental, like *prie-dieux*, when compared to Trecartin's jumpy productions—and not only because of the difference between still and moving images. I get hypomaniac when I enter Trecartin's amped sphere. Falling under his spell is as needling to the nerves as straddling the Scylla and Charybdis of Warhol's split-screen *Chelsea Girls*. A Trecartin quip: "Listen, don't get a boner." I'll try not to get a boner over Trecartin's evocation of the Now. Quote: "Don't look at me—look at your mother, and globalize at *her*." What does it feel like to be globalized, or to be dragged to the trash icon on the computer screen? The bubble-brain gestalt of the identity surfer turns depth psychology on its ass.

Trecartin's work might mean death to the Book, but tonight, I don't care. I'll find a nonbookish way to drum up a conceptual shelter in his stunted avatar Wait's personal really concise pussy. Narrative is one way: As Trecartin demonstrates, new forms of storytelling may thrive in talkative guerrilla cooperatives that eschew utopian promises, including the long-ago-dashed dreams of sexual and material liberation. And yet I imagine that Trecartin's tales, like any shape-shifter's, will need to keep floating evasively through the meshes of the market, if his flipped-out personae and hacked situations want to preserve their organlessness and their concentrated delirium. □

Dialects are Trecartin's acrylics. Spanglish. Country and western. Hip-hop. Sotheby's. Secretarial. Subcontinental, any continent. Dallas. The point of an accent seems to be its potential placelessness.



THE NEW YORKER

THE ART WORLD

THEIR GENERATION

"Younger Than Jesus" at the New Museum.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

How will upcoming artists respond to the down-going economy? They will make a point of entertaining themselves on the cheap, often in groups, and self-consciously, as members of an ingenuity- and drollery-loving generation that was weaned on the Internet and is game for the bust of the boom in which it was reared. So testifies "The Generational: Younger Than Jesus," the New Museum's arduously titled, newly instituted triennial, which presents work by fifty artists, from twenty-five countries, who have yet to blow out thirty-three candles on a birthday cake. The show is low-budget bubbly fun, for the most part—and noisy, what with all the videos and sound pieces. Its star, for me, is Ryan Trecartin, an American artist based in Philadelphia, who orchestrates a shaggy installation in which scripted, digitally eventful videos (catchable on YouTube) feature madcap, often sexually ambiguous performers enacting phantasmagorical dramas in squeaky voices at very high speed. The plot, if it can be called that, of one video concerns quadruplet girls whose father has told them that he wanted only triplets; two of the sisters resolve the familial anxiety by merging into one. Another winner is a Frenchman, Cyprien Gaillard, with a spectacular video, accompanied by a soundtrack of ghostly anthems, of brutalist apartment blocks in Ukraine (aerial views), Russia (the scene of a gang fight involving hundreds of young men), and France (a building at night spewing a lovely fireworks display before imploding—the occasion is a planned demolition, it turns out—in clouds of dust pierced by searchlights). One probably could tease political implications from Gaillard's architectural travelogue, but its pith, in the context of the show, is sheer youthful alacrity. What is being done in new art? Whatever the hell anybody feels like doing.

Unsurprisingly, "Younger Than Jesus" has dicey aspects. Start with the idea of sorting artists by age. One of the show's crew of staff curators, Laura Hoptman—writing in a catalogue packed with sociological essays, including charts of trends in substance abuse and sexual behavior—admits that generational analysis is akin to reading horoscopes, which are "suspiciously nonspecific, although we long for them not to be." In the abstract, every new generation is pretty much like the one that came before it: struggling Oedipally with its forebears, embracing the Zeitgeist, and otherwise reactivating stock patterns, meanwhile being fawned upon by marketers. If there is anything unique about today's young, it may be a precocious alertness to how such rhetorical typecasting and economic targeting work. This generation even usurps the process, by innumerable online means. Gone are the days, in the nineteen-eighties and nineties, when deconstruction-smitten academics and artists toiled to share their discovery that media and institutions are—get ready—manipulative. Viscerally sophisticated young artists are more interested in playing with materials and contexts that are purely gratuitous, or, at least, too anarchic or too desultory to be marshalled for or against any commercial interest or political tendency. It's a timely shift, given that, this year, sales of almost everything, very much including art, are down, and that, last year, theoretical politics were obliterated by the real thing. The only sorting system for artists that matters—according to individual quality and influence—will prevail, in time, over fashion. Not that there's anything wrong with fashion. Novelty keeps us spry, and it cleans up after itself by being gone in a minute.

For a sense of how fast and erratically the current art culture is moving, con-

sider that just last summer the New Museum mounted another international roundup, "After Nature," selected by one of the "Jesus" curators, Massimiliano Gioni, which heralded a revival of humanist sentiment and existential anguish, notably in figurative sculpture and staged photography. We were led to expect a darkly serious trend in art. What happened to that? Partly, the contrast involves mere repackaging. Gaillard's imploding building, a whoop in its present company, would likely have seemed apocalyptic in proximity to a film in the earlier show, by Werner Herzog, of burning Kuwaiti oil wells. But the museum's side step to upbeat theatricality doesn't feel arbitrary. It is at one with the distinctly fresh attitude of much of the work on view, which may be regarded as either laudably nimble or deplorably spineless. Remember Gilda Radner's character Emily Litella, on the old "Saturday Night Live," who chirped "Never mind!" when misunderstandings that had sparked her angry rants were pointed out to her? Thinking of that joke helped me focus on a quality of whipsaw humor that is rife in "Jesus." Call it "never-mindedness," a sort of booby-trapped cocksureness, foreseen by Nirvana. In Trecartin's work, soulful sincerity may own up at a moment's notice to being bedevilled nihilism, or just a manic hedge against boredom. The different tones flicker rather than blur. All are in force, all at once. You wouldn't think that a state of mind so self-sabotaging is sustainable, short of clinical insanity. But there it is, brightly and breezily.

Apropos of insanity, a video by the Scotsman Luke Fowler, one of several "Jesus" works that channel nostalgia for radical art and culture of the past, incorporates documentary footage from the psychiatrist R. D. Laing's notorious Kingsley Hall, a therapeutic community that he operated in East London from 1965 to 1970. Laing treated schizophrenics by encouraging them to develop, rather than suppress, the cracked logic of their thoughts. One may reject the notion that madness is somehow liberating (I do), but it's a fact of experience, familiar from Outsider art, that painful dissociation can produce impressions of aesthetic cogency. Fowler has fashioned a fugue of lin-

guistic non sequiturs that weave an unsettling spell. Another video montage, by Tigran Khachatryan, an Armenian, intercuts rushing crowd scenes from classic Soviet films by Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov with news coverage of political riots and shots of contemporary skateboarders and other incautious youths engaging in "Jackass"-

boring pictures, evocative of Francis Bacon and Philip Guston—that postpones judgment. The show offers photographs, too, in social-documentary and conceptual veins—the most impressive are staged street scenes, in woebegone Paris suburbs, by the Algerian Mohamed Bourouissa—and some sculpture of the jury-rigged-junk vari-

show, and about four hundred and fifty others who didn't make the cut, each get a page of reproductions and description. All were recommended by an advisory cohort of roughly a hundred and fifty curators, critics, and artists from around the world. Phone-book bulky, the tome is an instant memorial to today's international art network. In



A still from the video "Re'Search Wait'S" (2009), by Ryan Trecartin, an artist based in Philadelphia.

style, at times plainly bone-breaking behavior. It ends with a young man, naked, masturbating to orgasm while maintaining a facial expression of unruffled calm. The shock of ultimate excitement coextensive with disinterested detachment is never-mindedness in spades.

So far, I've mentioned only works in video, for a compelling reason—video is by far the predominant medium of adventurous young artists today. There are a few paintings on hand in the show; the best are by a Pole, Jakub Julian Ziolkowski, whose surrealistic imagination and formal inventiveness invite, and actually survive, comparison to Picasso. "The Great Battle Under the Table," a summary in minuscule detail of the Napoleonic wars, teeters on the verge of mere comic illustration, but there is a demonic oomph about it—endorsed by neigh-

ety that the New Museum celebrated in its inaugural exhibition, "Unmonumental," in 2007. But, four decades after the first portable videotape recorder became available, video has become a studio tool that's as second nature as pencils. Little by little, it has stolen fire from film, photography, theatre, concert performance, painting (with projections as murals), drawing (with animation), and, of course, television, exhaustively unpacking the history and the semiotics of the home screen. Video's only weakness has been commercial, as a product hard to commodify. But that handicap may be barely noticeable in the present art market.

One other work must be noted: a book, "Younger Than Jesus: Artist Directory," edited by the show's curators, and published by the New Museum and Phaidon Press. Artists in the

coming years, it will likely serve curators, dealers, and collectors as a Sears catalogue of inexorably older-than-Jesus talent. There's something sickening about the scale of the art-mediating infrastructure that the book represents, advertising more stuff than one might ever get around to looking at, let alone valuing. Out there in the night, while we sleep, incredible quantities of art are being carted around, archived, and so on, because it is somebody's job to do those things. Can we please not think about that? ♦

CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER

From the Lancaster (N.H.) Coös County Democrat.

On Oct. 12, State Police responded to a report of a theft of three quilts from a motel in Jefferson. The quilts were later found to have been folded and put in the closet by the tourists.



'Jesus' Saves

God bless the New Museum's tantalizing triennial. BY JERRY SALTZ

IN THE LAST YEARS of the boom, numerous artists came to the fore who have their aesthetic heads up the aesthetic asses of Gerhard Richter, Andy Warhol, Richard Prince, Cady Noland, and Christopher Wool. They make punkish black-and-white art and ad hoc arrangements of disheveled stuff, architectural fragments, and Xeroxed photos. This art deals in received ideas about appropriation, conceptualism, and institutional critique. It's a cool school, admired by jargon-wielding academics who write barely readable rhetoric explaining why looking at next to nothing is good for you. Many of these artists have

to create the final building-filling show of 50 artists from 25 countries. A swell 564-page "artist directory," showcasing the hundreds of artists who were seriously considered but didn't make the final cut, accompanies "Younger" and makes this one of the most refreshingly transparent exhibitions ever organized. (It's a kind of *salon des refusés* in book form.)

All the artists here were born after 1976 (and are therefore under 33, Christ's age at his death). Their generation is variously called the Millennials (is that a Pixar film? Or a pop band?), Generation Y, iGeneration, Generation Me, or (my favorite) Generation OMG! Most of the artists are

gazing fun. Loris Gréaud's turning spiral staircase is typical of the kind of art whose labels tell you more than the work does; in this case, we read that the title, *Nothing Is True, Everything Is Permitted, Stairway Edit*, refers to "an eleventh-century Nizari Ismaili mystical seet" and that the staircase "will never take you anywhere." (The label fails to mention that the piece looks like a retail-store display.) Cory Arcangel is a good artist, but his chromogenic print of a color spectrum is a decorative one-liner. It's tenth-generation art about art about the monochrome.

But then there are the tantalizers, and they make you see how art is changing,



Choi Yoon
This Is Bobby, 2008

sold a lot of work, and most will be part of a lost generation. They thought they were playing the system; it turned out that they were themselves being played.

The New Museum's flawed but tantalizing new triennial, "The Generational: Younger Than Jesus" puts this kind of art behind us and points to what might lie beyond that recycling machine. It's a big show, assembled by a big crowd: The New Museum asked 150 recognized artists, critics, and curators to recommend artists. They put together a list of 500 or so, and three in-house curators—Lauren Cornell, Massimiliano Gioni, and Laura Hoptman (a Millennial, Gen-Xer, and Boomer, respectively)—sifted through it

not undiscovered—three have been on art-magazine covers already, and many have been in museum shows and have sold work to famous collectors—but few are well known in the United States.

"Younger" has its frustrating moments, and most of them occur when the curators conform too completely to biennial habit, choosing art that follows standard conventions of late-late-late conceptualism. (The fourth floor, in particular, is pretty inert.) Anna Molska's video of two boys in gladiatorial jockstraps assembling a multipart black cube is cute, but it's just one more commentary on early-twentieth-century art. Cao Fei's formulaic forays into role-playing are flashy but only navel-

The show suggests that ideas about culture, ethnography, anthropology, and sociology, YouTube and Facebook, and science and documentary film have all become more important than *October* magazine postmodernism. Sociology is the new black. None of these artists is trying to advance the teleological ball or invent new forms. They're investigating the whole world, not just the art world. Their work is less about how we affect time and people than about how time and people affect us.

That's a welcome switch from the super-self-conscious, highly educated, insular art of the recent past. The best artists in "Younger" turn their gaze from their own belly buttons to gaze at other people's belly

buttons. They simultaneously occupy conflicting positions, are more sincere than ironic but ironic nevertheless, and see the world, not just art, as a living specimen. Better yet, they do this by violating the idiotic academic proscriptions against visual pleasure. (The theory folks disdain pleasure in art, all the while embracing it in their lives.) Their work has what theorist Gayatri Spivak called "radical vulnerability" and is an attempt to explore the strata of knowledge and experience.

A number of artists delight, but several blew me away. Cyprien Gaillard's riveting 30-minute video, *Desniansky Raion*, with its pulsing soundtrack by the amaz-

Art is being reanimated by a sense of necessity, freed of the compulsion to illustrate theory. It's breaking free.

installation involves a jet-plane interior, hanging suitcases, and videos of crazy kids of indistinct gender talking about tourism, time shares, and the credit crunch. Seeing it is like being patched into all of the computers in the world at

Glynn employed a gaggle of volunteers to build, over 24 hours, an enormous cardboard replica of the Eternal City. The first night, I watched kids fashion the altars and temples of Rome's archaic period; by the next morning, when I returned, they'd been destroyed ("by fires," said the artist), and I spied the beginnings of Classical Rome. Just before the opening, the whole city was again wrecked and left in ruins, as the Dark Ages began. Glynn is saying she's not going to listen to the bromides that assert that change takes time. Artists like her are saying they're ready to build Rome here and now. That's exciting.

"Younger Than Jesus" indicates that



A still from Cyprien Gaillard's *Desniansky Raion*, 2007.

ing French musician Koudlam, gives us beautifully choreographed footage of two huge gangs of Russian "underground fight clubs" squaring off and charging, then beating the crap out of one another, in a St. Petersburg housing complex. Next, in a public-housing project on the outskirts of Paris, we see a fireworks display over a building that is then blown up. Finally, we see footage of an ugly, snow-covered Kiev apartment block shot illegally from a miniature airplane. It's an amazing video, a harrowing record of ancient rituals' being revived in new ways in unexpected places, and a picture of our new cities of ruin.

Ryan Trecartin's scintillating two-room

once, Trecartin's ecstatic poetics of overload, color, and density promise to influence a generation of artists (for evidence of this, see the haunting installation of the very promising Dineo Seshee Bopape).

Chu Yun hired women to come to the museum and sleep in the middle of the gallery all day. The sight of a sleeping girl is less like Manet's confrontational sexuality than the soft perversion of artists like Boutevrou and Cabanel. (You decide if it's sexist.) Jakub Julian Ziolkowski's paintings aren't about academic ideas of formalism, happy doodling, or mannered figuration; they're visionary Bosch-meets-Enso.

Finally, in *The 24 Hour Roman Reconstruction Project*, the Los Angeles artist Liz

the alchemical essence known as the sublime, the primal buzz of it all, is no longer in God or nature or abstraction. These young artists show us that the sublime has moved into us, that we are the sublime; life, not art, has become so real that it's almost unreal. Art is being reanimated by a sense of necessity, free of ideology or the compulsion to illustrate theory. Art is breaking free. Even the New Museum itself, founded in 1977, is "younger than Jesus." Since it reopened in December 2007, it's become, despite its clinical spaces and a couple of misfires, the most consistently challenging, polemical art institution in the city. It, like the art in this show and everywhere, is being reborn. ■



Jakob Julian
Ziolkowski,
U-Boot
Wachoffizier



Cory Arcangel,
Photoshop CS, 100 by
72 inches, 3000PI, RGB,
square pixels, default
gradient "Spectrum",
mousedown y=1058
x=1748.9, mouse up
y=0,x=1160



Cyprien Gaillard,
Destiny's Room

"The Generational: Younger than Jesus"

★★★★★
New Museum of Contemporary
Art, through Jul 5 (see Museums)

The New Museum's
t-talking 'bout its
generation.
By Howard Halle

It's hard to stop thinking about the Whitney Biennial while wading through "Younger than Jesus." Even last spring, the impact of the Biennial had been blunted by the arrival the previous December of "Unmonumental," the inaugural exhibit at the New Museum's freshly minted home. Imagine what will become of the Whitney's franchise exhibition now that the bento box on the Bowery will be undertaking a similar roundup of contemporary artists every three years. GM Hummer, meet Toyota Prius.

Which isn't to say that "The Generational" doesn't share some of the same problems endemic to the Biennial; it does, especially in the way that it racks together scores of participants like so much visual inventory. (And when, exactly, did it become mandatory to display contemporary art in high

volume, whether in shows like this one or at art fairs? When did Costra become the template?) But "Younger than Jesus" does possess built-in advantages over the Biennial. Firstly, there's the New Museum's SANAA-designed edifice, which, as everyone in the art world knows, has horribly proportioned galleries. Ordinarily a minus, the spaces flatter the work; after all, if the museum's interior makes it look like an amateur institution, you're less likely to notice the amateurishness of the art. Secondly, the New Museum doesn't have "of American Art" appended to its name, meaning it can include artists from around the world without excuse or apology. Finally, there is the brutally reductive logic of the exhibit's organizing principle: That no one is older than 33. If that makes "The Generational" seem a bit like *Logan's Run*, that's the point. It's an admission that when people confuse innovation with youth, it's not because of any factual symmetry, but because they want their emerging artists pink-cheeked and easy on the eyes. For a cattle call like this one, venal is preferable to beef.

Doubtless the show's organizers—Lauren Cornell, Massimiliano Gioni and Laura Hojtmann—would argue a more complicated point: The artists,

by virtue of being born around 1980, share a sensibility uniquely shaped by their events and technologies they grew up with. That they may, but they also seem to have all read the same art-historical textbooks, for the works here, by and large, are much too indebted to the strategies of the past four decades. Still, if no one is thinking

If the show seems
like *Logan's Run*,
that's the point.

outside of the box, consider the carload: The exhibition begins with a timeline, kicking off in 1976, in which milestones the artists consider important are highlighted in black. Among these are the first NBA title the Chicago Bulls won with Michael Jordan, and the suicide of Kurt Cobain. With a history like that, the stakes, art-wise, aren't bound to be very high.

Indeed, the dearth of aesthetic mountaineering is due precisely to the fact that these artists inhabit a topology pummeled by Web interconnectivity and the insane flow of capital. If their work is distinguished by anything at all, it is a resolve to simply cope with the situation rather than challenge it, and the strategies they've adopted to do that run a gamut from intriguing to annoying. Some artists sublimate their efforts to overdetermined rationales. Kerstin Brätsch oil-on-paper paintings, for instance, have a

perfectly fine visual presence on their own, and yet, we're informed by a wall tag, they're sometimes made collaboratively with other artists, and are often used as backdrops for performances. Cory Arcangel indulges in the myth that anyone could do what he does. The title of his vibrantly colored chromogenic print is a recitation of the Photoshop moves used to create it. Viewers can conceivably repeat them and fashion their own copy, but can they get it into a museum show? Chu Yun, meanwhile, slips sleeping pills into live models who then sack out in the middle of the gallery, as if to say, Wake me when the universe ends.

The very best efforts here, however—Katerina Šeda's poignant installation about her grandmother; Cyprien Gaillard's meditation on urbanism and violence; Jakob Julian Ziolkowski's painterly synthesis of James Ensor, Henry Darger and Neo Rauch—all understand that despite the upheavals of change, the human condition remains the same. In this respect, the surreal, tween characters in Ryan Trecartin's apocalyptic videos remain familiar even if their hyperactive milieu seems tweaked and Twittered beyond recognition.

In effect, "Younger than Jesus" proposes that the only sustainable model for culture going forward is one that runs on a hybrid drivetrain. That's hardly a new idea, but for all of its faults, the show undeniably crackles with a quality that recent Biennials have sorely lacked: Electricity. ■



Kerstin Brätsch, Untitled
1 from "..." series

The New York Times

Arts & LEISURE

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2009

The New York Times

His Nonlinear Reality, and Welcome to It

By RANDY KENNEDY

MIAMI
THE shoot the night before had lasted into the next day, ending around 9 a.m. after a scene in which the perimeter of the kidney-shaped swimming pool had been set ablaze with rubbing alcohol. So when the artist Ryan Trecartin greeted a visitor that afternoon, sleepless for more than 24 hours, he ran his hands through his hair and said, "This really isn't me."

He meant that he wouldn't be much good for an interview. But he could just as well have been speaking in the voice of one of the maniacally mutable characters he plays in the videos he has been writing and directing for the last several years, characters whose hold on identity and existence itself seems so tenuous that they must keep talking to keep from disappearing. ("If I didn't take the liberties to glue these prop knobs onto my safe space, who would you think that I'd be?" demands one, in what has become Mr. Trecartin's signature unhinged vernacular: phrases that sound like something you might have



IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY

Scenes from Ryan Trecartin's latest video project, as yet unfinished and untitled.

heard before, on television or the Web, but haven't.)

Mr. Trecartin (pronounced tra-KAR-tun) was creating these characters more or less for himself and a band of friends and collaborators from the Rhode Island School of Design when one of his works, posted on his Friendster page, was seen in 2005 by the artist Sue de Beer, who brought it to the attention of a curator at the New Museum in Manhattan. In stunningly short order, even for an art world then still moving at breakneck speed, his work was everywhere: the 2006 Whitney Biennial, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the Saatchi Gallery in London, the collection of the Guggenheim Museum. And his most ambitious work to date, the movie-length "I-Be Area," which made its debut in 2007 at the Elizabeth Dee Gallery in Chelsea, was greeted

Continued on Page 30

ART

Welcome to His Nonlinear Reality

From Page 1

with a kind of joyous critical consensus rarely seen in the art world.

Mr. Trecartin, a friendly, loquacious, boyish-looking man who grew up in a steel-mill family in rural Ohio and who counts the Disney Channel and "Dirty Dancing" among his important artistic inspirations, was only 26 years old.

So there has been a lot of anticipation about what he will come up with next. And for the last five months Mr. Trecartin, now 28, has been working long hours to meet it in a slightly ramshackle Spanish-mission-style house on the edge of the Little Haiti neighborhood here that he has rented for \$2,000 a month and that serves as set, dormitory, editing suite, sculpture studio and site of a kind of continuous happening. The work that emerges — conceived now as a trilogy, two parts video and the third a performance — will take him back to the institution that helped discover him, the New Museum, where the video portions will be a key part of "Younger Than Jesus," the museum's first installment of a new triennial that will focus on the work of artists under 33, opening on April 8.

The raw material for Mr. Trecartin's new work is what is happening to the world economy as financial institutions implode and the mechanisms of capitalism and credit falter. So the house he has adopted as his temporary home is fitting: it is near the city's Design District, which has become an art-world hot spot in recent years, but in a rapidly changing middle-class neighborhood now dotted with foreclosure signs amid the crabgrass.

Even the reason he came to Miami plays well into his story line about transition. He originally arrived to make a smaller project at the request of the nonprofit Moore Space here, founded by the prominent collectors Rosa de la Cruz and Craig Robins, but they closed the space unexpectedly in October, in an example of the reordering that is beginning to unfold in the art world.



IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY



MOORE MOORE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Ryan Trecartin, above, is working on a trilogy, two parts video and one part performance, inspired by the state of the economy. Above right and top, images from the piece.

So with help from his gallery, collectors, the New Museum and several of his own beleaguered credit cards, he rented the house and began making sets and costumes with his friend and closest collaborator, Lizzie Fitch, and others. As filming began, he welcomed a steady stream of friends and regulars, along with professional actors — considerably more than he has used before, drawn partly from the child and teenage performers in Orlando, home of Walt Disney World and Universal Studios.

When a reporter arrived at the house the day after the all-night shoot, Ms. Fitch was still asleep in the pool house, and the

sun-splashed backyard was strewn with what looked like the aftermath of a small riot or a ritual for a new Day-Glo religion. Bricks lay everywhere around a brightly colored prop wall. Lifelike models of tiny purse dogs were scattered in the weeds. A white metal bed frame from Ikea was submerged in the pool. (Ikea and Target are the main sources of furniture and props for the project because of their ubiquity and faux-designery corporate blandness, Mr. Trecartin said.) Above the pool was a wooden armature rigged with a pulley that had been used to lower the artist into the water the night before, a *deus ex machina* in canary yellow shorts.

Asked how the neighbors reacted to such doings, he said that the house on one side was boarded up and occupied by squatters whom few people had seen. The eaves and roof of the large house on the other side are covered with security cameras, like vultures. No one is quite sure what its residents do.

"There's a lot of really weird things going on at our house," Mr. Trecartin said. "But those guys have these huge parties and actually make more noise, so they don't complain."

The shoots and plots have grown sub-



An unorthodox filmmaker uses the dire state of the economy to describe a world undergoing an epic, maybe never-ending transition.

stantially more complex since his days in Rhode Island and later, with many members of his group, in New Orleans, where they lived until Hurricane Katrina destroyed their house and much of Mr. Trecartin's work.

In "A Family Finds Entertainment," the video that brought him to public view, the fairly followable story involves a disturbed and disturbing black-toothed kid named Skippy (played by Mr. Trecartin) who borrows money from his parents, is filmed by a documentary maker, is hit by a car, is filmed by the documentary maker some more as he lies in the road, and whose soul seems to rise from his body when it hears the sounds of a rocking house party.

By "I-Be Area" Mr. Trecartin's characters had started to serve more as vehicles for his hyperactively interconnected ideas about family, belonging, identity, gender, the Internet and the entertainment industry. But they are much more fascinating than allegorical characters generally have a right to be, with names like Pasta and Jammie, yakking endlessly, arrogantly, pleadingly, in phantasmagoric makeup and crazy clothes. The title character, I-Be, is less a person than an idea of a person waiting to hijack or be hijacked by a personality. (To make things more interesting, I-Be has a clone, and the clone has an online avatar who seems to be mounting a rebellion; the clone and the avatar are both played by Mr. Trecartin in a Southern accent that sounds something like Carroll Baker's in "Baby Doll," except on acid.)

In one Web interview Mr. Trecartin helpfully described a chaotic scene in a macabre wood shop near the end of the video as "a conceptual part-cyber-hybrid platform that obeys and functions within both laws of physics and virtual-nonlinear reality and potential in Web 2.0/ultra-wiki communication malfunction liberation flow, add-on and debate presentation."

In an interview two days after the all-nighter, Mr. Trecartin, with a full night's sleep, said the new work, as yet unfinished and untitled, was using the dire state of the economy to describe a world in a state of epic, maybe never-ending transition. It is a place where the idea of credit becomes so abstract that "credit cards start to have conceptual agendas" and where people create and use their own currencies. The

Web becomes a catalyst for a "postgender world," said Mr. Trecartin, who is gay. Transvestites would not be the usual kind but instead "astrological trannies" or "personality trannies," choosing to exist in a state of not quite being one person.

Sitting in his office with Ms. Fitch, the walls behind him covered with circular diagrams that he said helped him keep track of characters, ideas and situations, he tried to describe parts of the numerous plots, which seem to collapse into one another like the perspectives in an Escher drawing.

"This is really hard to describe linearly," he said at one point. At another, trying to sum up after a long, rambling disquisition, he said, "It's all just driven by situations in a personality-based system," causing Ms. Fitch to laugh and double over in her chair, because she has watched him go through these kinds of patient — and quite sincere — gyrations before.

Massimiliano Gioni, the director of special exhibitions for the New Museum, said he often used the term "hysterical realism" — a phrase invented by the critic James Wood to characterize the overly manic language and story lines of fiction by writers like David Foster Wallace and Don DeLillo — to describe Mr. Trecartin's work and that of several other younger artists. But in their art, he said, the hysteria is raised to even more absurd heights, a reflection of the world they have inherited, drowning in information and images.

"It's as if information is speaking the characters rather than the other way around," Mr. Gioni said.

Lauren Cornell, the executive director of Rhizome (rhizome.org), the online art organization affiliated with the New Museum, said that though it was too limiting to describe Mr. Trecartin's work as being about life lived largely on and through the Web, "he really captures how the logic of it is becoming embedded in our lives."

The garish low-budget look and feel of his work, and its near-anarchy, are often compared to early John Waters, to Paul

McCarthy, to Mike Kelley and to drag actors like Jack Smith and Tom Rubnitz. But when asked, Mr. Trecartin said that he could not think of a work of art, video or otherwise, that had inspired him to want to become an artist. Ms. Cornell said that in long conversations with her in 2007 he told her that when he was first compared to Mr. Waters or to Mr. Smith, he had never heard of them.

"When I was young and my baby sitters came over and turned on music videos, I was inspired by that," Mr. Trecartin said in his office, where a desk with a large Mac monitor and 10 hard drives shares space with the rumpled mattress he often sleeps on. He said he also reads obsessively, almost completely online, and is feverishly devoted to conspiracy-theory sites and TED Talks, the brainy Web lecture series.

Ms. Fitch interrupted him disapprovingly: "Ryan, I've seen you look at a piece of art and be inspired by it."

Mr. Trecartin responded: "Yeah, but what? I really want to be reminded."

He said his goal when he begins to write — the dialogue in his works, despite seeming ad-libbed, is highly scripted — is for viewers to leave his work with a deep emotional response to a reflection of their culture, "but in a way that they really can't put their finger on why they felt like that."

While he is ecstatic about his success among curators and collectors, he has an online audience that is just as important to him, one that doesn't approach his work as art per se. Speaking of an earlier work in an online interview, he once said that if it fared well only among art-world people, "then I'll feel like a loser."

But judging from some of the comments on his YouTube channel, he is doing well by his other audience too. "That one hour, 48 minutes was the closest I'd come to someone who could understand me," wrote a viewer with the screen name Scandibilly after watching "I-Be Area." "Thank you! Thank you! I understand!"

Although he was born in 1981 into the first home-computer generation, Mr. Trecartin said he thinks that people even younger, who have never known a world without the Web, are the ones who understand his work most intuitively. He told of hiring several teenage actresses for his new video. He tried to explain the ideas for their surreal characters by simplifying them, but it wasn't working, so he just explained it the way he would have to himself. "And they were like, 'Oh, yeah, O.K.'"

"People born in the '90s are amazing," he said excitedly. "I can't wait until they all start to make art."

ONLINE: MORE RYAN TRECARTIN

Additional articles, news and reviews: nytimes.com/design

by Nick Stillman

Youth Initiative

NICK STILLMAN ON THE NEW MUSEUM TRIENNIAL

OSCAR WILDE QUIPPED LONG AGO that "in America the young are always ready to give to those who are older than themselves the full benefits of their inexperience." By now, his joke has perhaps worn a little thin, as the young of today roll their eyes at confused baby boomers fumbling hopelessly with "the e-mail." But it has also been corroborated by the ascendancy of youth culture over the course of the past century—and perhaps nowhere more so than in the art world of the past decade, in which dealers competed ferociously to trump one another by debuting the next new thing. Now, however, as a crumbling stock market and a dry well of credit conjure the possibility that galleries and collectors will turn to the safer investments offered by more established artists, the reign of the young, at least in the commercial art world, may well be over.

In the midst of this changing context, the rebuilt, refashioned, and reimagined New Museum in New York is launching a new triennial, whose first edition is titled "The Generational: Younger than Jesus." Jointly organized by Lauren Cornell, Massimiliano Gioni, and Laura Hoptman, it runs from April 8 through June 28 and features a roster of approximately fifty artists all under the age of thirty-three—that being, of course, the age at which Jesus died. The exhibition feels both awkwardly and appropriately timed. It could be that in an environment of pitched

financial worry, museum supershowes will remain among the few key sites of exposure for young artists, and one might even optimistically hope that the triennial heralds an age in which financial speculation is replaced by intellectual speculation, and sociopolitical ontologies come to matter more than economic potential. Still, it's hard not to see the emphasis on youth as reflecting poorly on an atmosphere in which a young artist whose CV isn't replete with solo exhibitions, inclusion in major international group shows, and a history of reviews is made to feel *behind*. The first press release for "The Generational"—issued this past June—justified the cutoff point by asserting, "Some of the most enduring, influential, and radical changes in art and history have been carried out by young people." That is unarguable, even if many artists have actually blossomed only when well into their thirties or older. An acknowledgment of this unspoken reality is perhaps latent in the exhibition's subtitle, which might be understood as also alluding to artists' early career crises—a touch of curatorial gallows humor, maybe.

In the same press release, New Museum director Lisa Phillips further elucidated the exhibition's premise with the claim that "new generations . . . reveal urgently important things the rest of us cannot yet see, anticipating the future and helping shape what is coming next." Yet the very concept of a generation appears

challenged by the variety of the artists in "The Generational," who range from the relatively unknown (Mariechen Danz, Ida Ekblad) to more recognized figures, such as typography/symbology-obsessed Taha Auerbach or notorious YouTube pioneer and Pecker-like gallery sensation Ryan Trecartin. Does the proximity of the years of their birth really bring together people separated by wildly disparate national, racial, moral, economic, and political situations? Or, put differently, will "The Generational" end up revealing the notion of a generation as too complex

The show's installation is conceived to match a vision of "Generation Y" by presenting a "co-existence of individualities" approximating the matrices of social networking websites.

an organism to capture in one exhibition?

The curators stress the commonalities that they expect to become evident—among them preoccupations with history, the omnipresence of technology, and the changing construction of families, tribes, and social groups. Indeed, the exhibition's installation is conceived to match a vision of "Generation Y" as "the first natives of a digital world" by presenting, in Gioni's words, a "co-existence of individualities"

approximating the matrices of social networking websites.

The exhibition's unorthodox curatorial methodology also reflects this notion of a digitally networked global community. In selecting their international roster of artists, the curators traveled very little themselves, instead engaging the services of ten "correspondents" and approximately 150 curators and critics involved in local scenes around the world, who were asked for recommendations. Special attention was paid to countries traditionally underrepresented in American group shows—Algeria, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Romania among them. This devolved methodology approximates the philosophy of decentralization that drove *Charley*—the magazine Gioni coedited with Maurizio Camelan and Ali Subornick—which tapped contributors to create single pages for huge issues, as well as the 2007 Lyon Biennale, orchestrated by Stephanie Moisdon and Hans Ulrich Obrist, for which forty-nine critics and curators were asked to participate in a kind of game in which each invited a single artist.

This move toward reliance on networks and secondhand information makes sense, especially as art-world travel diminishes in leaner times. Such a shift seems reflected in the "directory" that (in addition to a catalogue-*com*-"reader") accompanies the show. This tome includes information on the five-hundred-plus artists who were recommended for

inclusion, offering—appropriately for an Internet-influenced show—a voyeuristic peek into the losers' bracket, while implicitly acknowledging the inevitability of a degree of arbitrariness in any survey of a massive art world with such a polyphony of positions. Still, it'll be fascinating to see the outcome: Will the confluence of exhibition model and networked generation succeed, or will it expose the limits of technology and globalization's ability to close the gaps of geography and culture? □

NICK STILLMAN IS A BROOKLYN-BASED ARTIST AND WRITER AND THE MANAGING EDITOR OF *BOBAC*.



Ryad Sattouf, *Shimmy That Just E-mailed Me*, 2006. Jests from a sister video, 7 minutes, 21 seconds. (From left): Tanya (Blue Sweater), Tanya (Blue Sweater) and Ben (Luce Face).



HOLLAND COTTER

Video Art Thinks Big: That's Showbiz

A Medium Breaks the Bonds
Of Time and Expectation
To Find Its Inner Razzle-Dazzle

WE'RE in a house of many tight, messy rooms. In the suburbs? Cyberspace? Hard to say. Anyway, it's night. A door bangs open. A girl, who is also a boy, dashes in, talking, talking. Other people are already there, in gaudy attire, dire wigs and makeup like paint on de Koonings.

Everyone moves in a jerky, speeded-up, look-at-me way and speaks superfast to one another, to the camera, into a cellphone. Phrases whiz by about cloning, family, same-sex adoption, the art world, the end of the world, identity, blogging, the future. Suddenly indoors turns into outdoors, night into day, and we're at a picnic, in dappled sunshine, with a baby. Then this all reverses, and we're indoors again. A goth band is pounding away in the kitchen. The house is under siege. Hysteria. Everyone runs through the walls.

This is a highly impressionistic account of Ryan Trecartin's sensationally anarchic video "I-Be Area," which made its debut in the Elizabeth Dee Gallery in Manhattan last fall. The piece caused a stir, in part because most people had never seen anything quite like it before, certainly not in an art gallery.

Art video still has a funny reputation, left over from the 1960s, of being a serious medium, made for function rather than pleasure, as opposed to film. Yet "I-Be Area" was pleasure all the way. It was nonstop visual razzle-dazzle. It drew on every cheap-thrill trick in the digital graphics playbook.

More radically, it was the length of a feature film. More radically still, it told a story, one with dozens of characters and multiple subplots, which is what entertainment, not art, is supposed to do, if you assume there's a hard and fast difference between the two.

Mr. Trecartin, apparently, does not assume this. He is not alone. The American artist and performer Kalup Linzy, for example, has invented a serial soap opera around a dysfunctional African-American family. Sadie Benning uses hand-drawn animation to tell bittersweet tales of urban gay life. Nathalie Djurberg, born in Sweden and living in Berlin, sculpts clay figures and sets them in sadistic encounters. These artists, using video that is cheaper and more accessible than ever thanks to digital technology, are creating a new kind of 21st-century art that is narrative in form and potentially epic in scale.

At present it is shaped by a combination of pop fantasy, ingrained cybersmarts, neo-tribalism and an angst-free take on contemporary life that marks an attention-deficient Internet culture.

The relationship of this work to an art world structured on galleries, museums and fairs is, potentially at least, one of detachment. You can experience "I-Be Area" on a laptop wherever and whenever you want. That may be a reason why few of these new video artists feel the need to live in New

Continued on Page 18

Scenes from Ryan Trecartin's feature-length "I-Be Area" (2007), video art with razzle-dazzle effects and narrative structure.

ART

Video Art Thinks Big: That's Showbiz

From Page 1

York City. They have chosen a medium that is not only flexible and affordable but has a history of embracing experimentation.

Video 40 years ago offered restless, pennurious, disenfranchised and performance-based artists (many women worked in early video) an alternative to the blue-chip clubbiness of Pop painting and Minimalist sculpture. Video was associated with television and newsreels, not art. It was available and fairly easy to learn. Because it had no aesthetic history, it came with no fixed expectations. Using it allowed artists like Vito Acconci, Joan Jonas, Nam Jun Paik to open a fresh chapter in art history.

Video, it is important to note, was not a static medium. Painting and sculpture could, in their ways, tell stories, but video could make stories move through time and keep moving indefinitely. Because it was relatively cheap, you could fool around with it, improvise and edit like crazy. Experimentation naturally led to self-indulgence. There was a lot of terrible, boring video in the '70s. But there was at least as much boring, terrible painting. Some of that painting still hogs space in our museums while videos sit on a shelf.

With time video gained credibility, meaning it found a market. Production values rose: better tape, richer color, smoother projection. Technical differences between video and more expensive and durable film media began to blur. After the '70s, in the interest of commerce, videos grew shorter, more polished and more self-contained, more like objects. But narrative, which required watching a video from start to finish, was a problem. With hundreds of galleries springing up in the '80s art boom, who had time to spend an hour in a dark room on a Saturday afternoon?

For the same reason, one would expect narrative video to be even less welcome now. Now there are more galleries than ever. And no environment could be more video-averse than art fairs, with cramped booths entirely geared to drive-by shopping. Yet here is Mr. Trecartin, asking us to sit for an hour and 48 minutes for a high-concept, intensely detailed, attention-demanding experience. And we gladly comply.

We do so, first of all, because "I-Be Area" is so giddy, so different. But it's also just plain strange, which is part of the larger appeal of today's video art. It represents a possible way out of something, out of the renewed tyranny of the precious object, out from under a boutique art market that has amassed grotesque wealth and power while making art itself seem small and utterly dispensable.

Mr. Trecartin, born in Texas in 1981, produces work of its moment in others' ways too; it is the natural product of a generation that grew up on television and grew into the Internet. At the same time a segment of this generation wants to get away from cellphones, the Web and instant, non-stop information. So Mr. Trecartin and, even more decisively, some of his peers are using very basic digital tools to create a highly personal narrative art, almost a kind of folk art.

It is an art that adheres to the market-sanctioned genius model. Mr. Trecartin directs his videos, writes the script, designs the costumes and takes several leading roles. But he also describes his art as a collective project very much shaped by a circle of family and longtime friends. One of these friends, Lizzie Fitch, he lists as a collaborator; she is almost as prominent in the videos as Mr. Trecartin himself.

Finally, as is true with several other artists working in narrative video, Mr. Trecartin's work is part of a second or possibly third wave in queer identity politics. The big change lies in emphasis. For queer artists of Mr. Trecartin's generation, cross-dressing, cross-identifying and cross-thinking are part of a state of being, not statements of political position. Like the work of John Waters and Jack Smith, his art is about just saying no to life as we think we have seen it and saying yes to zany, virtual-utopian possibilities.

The New York artist Kalup Linzy, born in 1977, has also cooked up a populous and intensely imagined narrative in video, one based in part on the soap operas and sitcoms he watched as a child. In a multi-episode serial with the umbrella title "All My Churen," he takes the daytime drama format, with its turgid emoting and big secrets, to present the life of a fictional African-American family called the Braswells in the rural South.

As a group the family members touch on a prickly range of black stereotypes. They are all played, with awesome panache, by Mr. Linzy.

The video artist Kalup Linzy as all the characters in "All My Churen," inspired by the storytelling traditions of daytime drama.



Culturally speaking this is a reference-intensive work, though the very notion of high art versus low art is long gone. Cindy Sherman, "The Jeffersons," Manet, Richard Pryor, Zora Neal Hurston and the drag diva Vaginal Davis are all at the same V.I.P. party. Queerness is assumed, not even worth a comment. Each video episode is an auteur product: Mr. Linzy writes, directs, acts, designs and overdubs the supporting characters with his own voice. But it's a product developed within a tight community of artist friends.

A big difference between his work and Mr. Trecartin's is in the degree of digital engagement. Mr. Trecartin goes wild with editing bells and whistles; Mr. Linzy does not. The plainness and occasional clunkiness of his video technique is one reason the Braswell serial ends up touching in a way that Mr. Trecartin's buzzed-up narratives rarely are. For all their raunchy hilarity Mr. Linzy's characters are more than cartoons; "All My Churen" is a family-values story that has a lot to do with life.

The same is true of some outstanding recent narrative video that substitutes animated characters for live actors. In these works cultural references to a childhood

At midpoint in the video the animated walkers converge on a small bar, and the mood lightens up. It's a gay bar filled with lovers and friends. A communal retreat, it's a mini-Eden, or could be in a different world. The video's final scene is in an airport, a place of goodbyes. Figures sit in isolation. The police patrol. We're back to the mood we started with.

Then there's one last image, of a couple — they might be women or men — making love on the wings of an ascending plane as silver birds float like angels through a night sky.

If Ms. Benning pulls some of the utopianism latent in Mr. Trecartin's art to the surface, another young storyteller, the Swedish artist Nathalie Djurberg, almost gleefully buries it in video animations that depict a dog-eat-dog world. Ms. Djurberg,

*A new kind of
21st-century art that is
narrative in form and
potentially epic in scale.*

born in 1978, has gone back in time to find her chosen medium, old-fashioned stop-action animation using hand-molded plasticene figures.

With this labor-intensive technology, she has created a series of picaresque short narratives that have a fanciful, fairy-tale look but devolve into scenes of cruelty and degradation: a child sexually abuses a cat; a woman whips a slavish young girl; a man slices himself to bits. Flesh rips, blood flows and characters weep big clay tears, not because they're sorry for the vile deeds they've done but because they've had to stop.

Another video by Ms. Djurberg, made on commission for Performa 07 and introduced to New York last fall, was her most ambitious yet, in every way a tour de force. Nearly an hour long, it depicts a fight to the death between a racially mixed gang of children and a pack of ravenous dogs over a meal of garbage. The scene goes on and on; dogs and kids are killed left and right, only to be resurrected in a hospital emergency room where they are tortured by doctors and nurses. Ms. Djurberg, along with two musicians — the composer Hans Berg and her brother, Pascal Strauss — accompanies it with a live score, using toys,

kitchen utensils, squeezed balloons and crushed cornflakes.

This deservedly well-received piece brings to mind certain older videos by Bruce Nauman and Paul McCarthy and bears a close relationship, psychic if not stylistic, to Kara Walker's slave-narrative puppet animations. There are also plenty of comparisons to be made to work of Ms. Djurberg's peers. I'm thinking of the ghoulish puppet animations by Bert Green and the chilling stop-action re-enactment of a robbery and murder, using animated G.I. Joe dolls, by Hank Willis Thomas and Kambui Olijimi. Then there's Mr. Olijimi's video of the life and death of a young prostitute, told within the time it takes for Nina Simone to sing "House of the Rising Sun," and the hallucinatory five-minute version of Roman Polanski's "Repulsion" by the talented Keren Cytter.

The Beijing artist Cao Fei gave us one of the best single videos to come out of China in the past few years in her "COSPlayer," about a day in the life of a feral population of adolescents who dress as Japanese anime heroes and live on the fringe of a mushrooming city. And there's the wonderful, Kafkaesque "Lost City" by Gigi Scaria, an artist from New Delhi, which I recently saw at the Newark Museum.

It's about a young man whose memory deserts him day by day. We first watch him labeling photographs of family members and acquaintances so he can remember them. Next he makes elaborate maps of his daily route to work. Finally he posts directional signs on trees and walls along the route. At the end of the video we see him stranded in the street. Someone has taken the signs down, and he can't find his way home.

Mr. Scaria, who was born in 1973, works in a traditional, linear, scene-by-scene style. Other video storytellers, like Ms. Cytter, stretch or truncate time and place. Still others, like Mr. Trecartin, are at some outer, experimental edge of video, narrative and time alike, pushing all three further out with every new piece.

In a time of speeded-up production and marketing, they are making art that runs by a different clock. They are also making art that does things that objects can't do. And they are, potentially and some cases actually, reaching audiences by a new route. When you have YouTube at your disposal, who needs Chelsea?

ONLINE: VIDEO

Excerpts from works mentioned in Holland Cotter's article:

nytimes.com/design

universe of cartoons and puppets, originally intended to amuse and instruct, now are used to explore adult trauma.

Sadie Benning, born in Wisconsin in 1973, started making short narrative videos with a PixelVision camera as a teenager. She has since refined a distinctive style of hand-drawn cartooning, engagingly applied in her 30-minute video "Play Pause" (2006) to an updated Pilgrim's Progress. The video tracks several solitary figures, men and women, through an unnamed city. They walk the streets to a grim pop beat — Ms. Benning was a founding member of the feminist New Wave band Le Tigre — and troubling sights catch their eyes: newspaper headlines, corporate advertising, security cameras.



Scenes from "Play Pause" (2006), from the video artist Sadie Benning. The 30-minute animated work depicts a kind of Pilgrim's Progress, with security cameras and an Edenic gay bar.

What's on the Art Box? Spins, Satire and Camp

"You are the product of TV," declares "Television Delivers People," Richard Serra's six-minute 1973 video screed of scrolling text set to elevator music.

ART REVIEW

KAREN
ROSENBERG

If Mr. Serra were to recreate the piece today, he might call it "People Deliver Television." The Whitney Museum of American Art's new show of single-channel video works, which takes its title from Mr. Serra's piece, tries to put in perspective the changes wrought by the DVR, YouTube and, more recently, the writers' strike. Organized by Gary Carrion-Murayari, a curatorial assistant, it combines television-obsessed works from the 1970s, '80s and '90s with fresh material from young artists for whom the "idiot box" is just one of many interactive screens.

"Television Delivers People" continues through Feb. 17 at the Whitney Museum of American Art, (212) 570-3600, whitney.org.

Television Delivers People

Whitney Museum of American Art

Clocking in at close to four hours of video (two and a half on a projection screen and another hour or so on a series of television monitors), the show may test the patience of viewers who have grown accustomed to five-minute shorts. Those intent on watching the whole thing may want to do it in two or three sessions. (The longest piece, Alex Bag's "Untitled Fall '95," is 57 minutes, and no clock or little red progress bar is provided.) Most people will simply drift in, catch a few minutes of whatever happens to be playing on the big screen and then move on to the next exhibition.

More committed viewers should start with the three works displayed on monitors (which include the Serra video). One, Mike Smith's "It Starts at Home" (1982), takes Mr. Serra's aphorism to a literal extreme. In this mock sitcom, Mr. Smith plays a

regular Joe who signs up for cable service and suddenly finds himself on television. The piece is longer than it should be, but worth watching for Mr. Smith's comically befuddled expressions and for Eric Bogosian, who is the disembodied voice of the tough-talking boss.

Dara Birnbaum's "Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman" (1978-79) requires only the most minimal attention span. This five-minute sequence strings together clips from the popular 1970s "Wonder Woman" television show, focusing on the magic spin that morphed the actress Lynda Carter into the scantily attired superhero. A mesmerizing stutter effect, timed to the disco soundtrack ("shake your wonder-maker"), makes for a kitschy sendup of Justice League sexism.

The deconstructionist programming continues on the large screen, with Joan Braderman's "Joan Does Dynasty." In this half-hour video from 1986 the artist deconstructs that '80s soap opera, which starred Joan Collins



Lynda Carter spins in Dara Birnbaum's "Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman."



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ELECTRONIC ARTS INTERMIX

In Mike Smith's "It Starts at Home," Mr. Smith's character suddenly finds himself on TV.

as Alexis Carrington Colby. Talking over the characters with a mixture of contempt and glee, she applies Foucault and feminism to Alexis and the show's other outrageous schemers. These theories may have fallen out of fashion, but the piece resonates as a critique of yuppie values that could just as easily be applied to "Gossip Girl."

There is only one representative from the '90s, perhaps because that decade in video art was dominated by sweeping, multichannel installations. Fortunately, Ms. Bag's "Untitled Fall '95" (1995) covers a lot of territory. Ms. Bag poses as a School of Visual Arts student with a dyed red pageboy and a Valley Girl drawl who updates us on each semester of her college experience. Between the segments of her video diary are fake phone-sex ads, skits with potty-mouthed puppets and a slide lecture by a droning, self-obsessed artist who films the contents of her purse.

Ms. Bag's naïve undergraduate emerges from art school a changed, bitter creature. In one hilarious scene she complains about an achingly hip professor who misquotes a Nirvana song. "Stop selling my culture back to me," she pleads, neatly encapsulating the Kurt Cobain era.

Ms. Bag's satiric self-transformations have set the stage for the

emerging performance artist Tamy Ben-Tor, among others, but they can sometimes come across as high camp, as is the case with her second piece here. A remix of her shrill Joan Crawford spoof, "Harriet Craig" (1998), with a series of mock commercials from 2004, it targets conglomerates like Procter & Gamble and the company formerly known as AOL Time Warner. One explores the "metrosexual," a term that now seems as dated as the hype over the merger of AOL and Time Warner.

More up-to-date works take their cues from reality television. In "Dreamtalk," by Keren Cytter, a young man obsesses about the female star of a dating show as he prepares and shares a meal with his girlfriend and best friend. The other characters interrupt his thoughts with their own syntactically challenged voice-overs, acting out the propped-up love triangles of the reality genre with a disconcerting, Brechtian sense of alienation.

In Kalup Linzy's "Melody Set Me Free" (2007) the focus shifts to the televised talent competition. A plucky young girl named Patience O'Brien enters a contest of Whitney Houston impersonators, overcoming would-be saboteurs and the disapproval of her strict mother. Mr. Linzy supplies the voices for all of the charac-

ters, including the slightly off-key singers. Lurking behind Mr. Linzy's feel-good story and virtuosic performance is the cautionary tale of Ms. Houston's decline.

The show's youngest artist, Ryan Trecartin, doesn't start with a recognizable genre; he creates his own, with Day-Glo paints, thrift-store costumes and a seizure-inducing arsenal of digital effects. His video "What's the Love Making Babies For" is not as compelling as his recently exhibited epic "I-Be Area," though mercifully shorter at 20 minutes. Its adolescent characters declare themselves to be beyond gender and the sexual reproductive system. Since they look like the children of Matthew Barney and David Bowie, it's easy enough to believe them.

The Whitney's minisurvey of art about television is only a small, performance-oriented slice. It could have included Paul Pfeiffer's digitally edited sports and entertainment clips, Nathalie Djurberg's sadomasochistic Claymations or the recent Turner Prize nominee Phil Collins's series about disgruntled reality-show participants. In charting such a precise path from Mr. Serra to brand-new work with a YouTube following, it historicizes a medium that is still, as the writers' strike reminds us, in transition.

The New York Times

© 2007 The New York Times

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2007

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FR

Art in Review

Ryan Trecartin

I-Be Area

Elizabeth Dee Gallery
345 West 20th Street, Chelsea
Through Oct. 13

The debut of Ryan Trecartin's new video, "I-Be Area," is the best thing that could have happened to the New York fall art season. Almost any slice of its 100-minute running time radiates more new-feeling energy than a dozen shows in the surrounding blocks. Painting, sculpture, installation, performance — "I-Be Area" has it all, as well as language: a fictional but real language of murderous non sequiturs buried in sitcom teenage prattle.

The video has at least one and probably many very complicated plots. They center on a group of four or five male-ish and female-ish characters, all played by Mr. Trecartin, who also wrote, directed, designed and edited the piece. (Most of the other actors in the large cast are family, friends and artists, with some hired professionals thrown in.)

Locations are multiple too. One minute you are in a classroom, then on YouTube, then in a suburban living room, then at band rehearsal, then at a slumber party, in an overall set that could be a single house or a labyrinthine bunker or cyberspace or some contracting and expanding psychic space, all interior, no exterior.

Characters walk through walls, spill out of gym lockers, communicate telepathically. They also change identities, which entails changing outfits and makeup. (Some of the more interesting painting I've seen in New York recently is in the film, most of it on faces.) To trace which character is where, when, and why would probably require repeat viewings. But even when "I-Be Area" looks like a chaotic snarl, it doesn't feel like one. You can't exactly see the logic, but you know it's there, which is a big deal in so complex a piece.

Style, of course, helps, and Mr. Trecartin has lots of it, in the design, in the flickery editing, in the way the voices are recorded with weird switches of pitch and amplification. Some effects are laugh-out-loud funny the first time around; then they become just part of the mix, part of this world in which Mr. Trecartin has placed you deeply.

An hour and 40 minutes is a



TOM POWELL IMAGING

A set from Ryan Trecartin's "I-Be Area," at Elizabeth Dee.

long stretch to sustain interest and at certain points the momentum sags. But then, as if catching your stifled yawn, the piece makes up for the lapse with a burst of faster action and louder noise. (Elizabeth Dee also has, in the front gallery, a group of sculptures consisting of pieces of the original "I-Be Area" sets, but the video is the main event.)

When I call Mr. Trecartin's energy new-feeling, I use new in the current sense, meaning, basically, old but pumped up or down, or tweaked or twisted in some way. Mr. Trecartin, in his 20s, grew up in Ohio and now lives in Philadelphia, and owes a lavish debt to Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith, John Waters and a rich tradition of queer film and theater, as well as to artists, queer and not, like George and Mike Kuchar, Peggy Ahwesh, Sadie Benning, Paul McCarthy, John Bock, Kalup Linzy, K8 Hardy, Sue de Beer and the collective Paper Rad.

Oh, and he definitely owes a debt to the Internet, where everything is allowed because you allow it, and where many people, including several of those in "I-Be Area," live full time these days. Mr. Trecartin takes something from all of this and adds something to it, something yet to be described or defined, but newish, and this is great.

HOLLAND COTTER

REVIEWS

Ryan Trecartin

ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY

In Mary Jordan's documentary on the movie director Jack Smith, *Jack Smith and the Destruction of Atlantis*, 2006, the filmmaker and musician Tony Conrad has a wonderful memory of seeing *Flaming*



Ryan Trecartin, *I-Be Area*, 2007, still from a color video; 1 hour, 48 minutes

Creatures (1963) for the first time: "The screen lit up with this lambent, wonderful, surging, frolicking, exquisitely happy moment." I recalled that line while watching *I-Be Area*, the 1-hour-48-minute video work that was the heart of Ryan Trecartin's recent show. I'm not sure *I-Be Area* is exquisitely happy; its content is too elusive to be sure. But Trecartin follows on from Smith in a number of ways, from his DIY, Salvation Army-shopping aesthetic (gratifying at a time when high-production-value art has become a constricting convention) to his work's vivid sense of community. Whether as characters or as the performers who play them, the cast of Trecartin's movie evokes a world—a largely young public sharing understandings and sympathies, tastes and drives—in tune with the present moment. For a glimpse of the ethos of the upcoming generation, *I-Be Area* is as good a place as any to go.

That said, like Smith's own downtown-Manhattan gay scene of the '60s and '70s, Trecartin's people are a minority in Republican America. Fluidly polysexual, they take as a given the culture that Smith's films, and those of successors like John Waters, helped bring into being, or at least to move from a repressed and underground status to visibility, thereby changing that culture dramatically. And they update those earlier films in that Trecartin and his friends have grown up in the age of the Internet and of Final Cut Pro. As his critics are in the habit of remarking, they are formed as much by YouTube as by movies—and if the aesthetics of YouTube ultimately trace back to movies, to television, and to advertising, they also replace the gloss those media cherish with homegrown, cheap resourcefulness in terms of props, scripts, and mise-en-scène. This is art that anyone can make—though far from everyone on YouTube, unfortunately, has figured out the rapid and sinuous editing that Trecartin manages, let alone his Hawaiian-shirt palette, his pace and energy, or his visual and verbal inventiveness.

The omnipresence of the Internet today, and of computers in the home, has led to questions, indeed anxiety, about the shaping of identity. The middle-aged and older group to which I belong knows that younger people are growing up with different inputs than we did ourselves. To the extent that *I-Be Area* has a plot, it addresses just these identity issues: The central character, I-Be II, is a clone, and themes of artificial life, adoption and parentage, original and copy (among people, not artworks), radiate throughout. In Trecartin's world, you can literally become a different person by deciding to—just as you can by using an alias on the Internet. The name "I-Be" itself puts identity on the front burner. But the story line is hard to follow; rapid intercutting between speakers tends to break continuity and flow—although the characters are talking to each other, we mostly see them talking to the camera or to someone offscreen—and unified sequences, conversations, and locations rapidly give way to new ones in a way that is strangely both liquid and disconnected. Perhaps this redefinition of plot in itself points to a redefinition of identity, although one hesitates to draw conclusions that grand—but it certainly contributes to the surging, frolicking mood of the work as a whole.

—David Frankel

Time Out

New York

SEPTEMBER 27-OCTOBER 3, 2007
ISSUE 626 \$2.99 TIMEOUTNEWYORK.COM

Ryan Trecartin, "I-Be Area"

★★★★★

Elizabeth Dee Gallery,
through Oct 13 (see Chelsea)

What would happen if all the characters appearing in those flickering videos on YouTube got together and decided to put on a show? They might look like the films of Ryan Trecartin, the 26-year-old wunderkind who was the youngest artist in the 2006 Whitney Biennial. Trecartin makes movies with a pack of friends who embody the clones, poseurs, avatars and wanna-bes of contemporary Internet culture. The plots are slippery and almost non-narrative, but his style is so original and refreshing that the work could never be called boring. Often, in fact, it's downright thrilling.

The show is centered around *I-Be Area*, Trecartin's latest film, shown in its 100-minute entirety in a darkened room in the gallery. It's worth watching from beginning to end as it traces a day in the life of I-Be II, the superindependent clone of I-Be, played by Trecartin with a Southern accent. Veering between surrealism and science fiction, Trecartin takes on multiple personae, including a witless Valley girl named Oliver and Pasta, a he-she sweetheart with a Dutch boy haircut. The artist made all the sets and costumes, giving the film the look of an amateur theater



production—but in a good way, like the work of Kenneth Anger or Paul McCarthy. Pay attention to the script, also written by Trecartin: It's packed with witty allusions, taking shots at the art world, Internet chatrooms, cellphone filmmakers and self-designated blog stars.

The installations on view at the gallery are made from materials reclaimed from the movie set. *Jamie's Band*, a sculpture built out of school lockers and classroom desk-chairs, is one element of the final scene when the narrative devolves into a brawl-like be-in for a generation that doesn't quite know what it wants to be or even what *being* means. With his multitude of talents, Trecartin is poised to become the next Matthew Barney, the perfect artist for an era when iPhones, MySpace and *Project Runway* dominate contemporary aesthetics.

—Barbara Pollack

PRICE \$4.50

THE
NEW YORKER

OCT. 1, 2007

RYAN TRECARTIN

The thought of sitting through an hour-and-forty-minute video could fill any gallery-goer with dread, but Trecartin's "I-Be Area" is worth the investment. It's a plummet down a cyberspace rabbit hole, filled with campy characters- club kid meets vaudeville-sporting cheerfully grotesque makeup, and discussing cloning, adoption, and replication. It all makes sense, when considered through the filter of media culture, where MySpace hopefuls dream of superstardom ("I can't live without an audience," a character quips). You keep waiting for Trecartin to slip and for the video to lose steam. To his credit, it never does. Through Oct. 13. (Dec, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545.)

Flash Art

RYAN TRECARTIN

ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY



RYAN TRECARTIN, *I-Be Area*, 2007. Video still, 108 mins. Courtesy Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York.

Characters whine "Just Delete Yourself!" But wait until after you have seen *I-Be Area*, Ryan Trecartin's latest romp into YouTube cyber-reality. This feverish 100-minute video hosts a diverse cast that includes children, a pregnant woman and a group of twenty something characters of vague gender. A fusion of *Pee-wee's Playhouse* and *Desperate Living*, the piece is shot in an amateur style, conceived, scripted and edited by the artist. The front of the gallery holds a series of prop installations that were used in the video.

The settings are mutable and move without visible reason between a suburban home, a classroom, a garage and a bedroom, with a foray into a suburban office park and a corn field in the snow. A psychedelic sensibility permeates this campy almost-narrative to chaotically surreal effect; split screens and roving flashlight beams contribute atmosphere. Trecartin plays several characters including Pasta, whose identity morphs with changes of wig, costume and garish makeup including colored teeth. Voices change pitch, as characters have tantrums and interact.

The clever yet incongruous statements that the characters spout off manage to keep us engaged. Not always tied to the action, the statements can be nonsensical. What seems like brainless banter often contains impossible existential aphorisms — "I am temporary." "Eat yourself, you'll get full and it won't matter" — that keep the viewer pondering and cracking up.

Statements repeat with demented emphasis: "here now" and "me you" run through the work. Cut, copy and paste provide a parallel for identity issues involving same-sex parents, adoption and cloning. "This is who I am and this is how I feel," and "I want my own channel," are spoken by those infected with the fame-and-fortune bug. There is a creative/destructive subplot with slapping dolls, breaking windows and destructive statements: "the world ended three weeks ago." This work investigates the tools and tirades of the next generation. Fresh and fearless, Ryan Trecartin's *I-Be Area* dares to take us to the 'edge of understanding.'

Gregory Montreuil

ARTFORUM

DECEMBER 2007

INTERNATIONAL

BEST OF 2007

ON THE GROUND

New York

DEBRA SINGER



THE NEW YORK STORY may seem to be one of money, but even so, it is a tale encompassing many turns. Certainly, the celestial auction prices of an overheated art market dominated headlines in 2007, to say nothing of griping kaffeeklatsches of collectors, curators, and gallerists. Yet underdiscussed, perhaps, is how the long-bullish economy has affected sectors of the New York art scene that ostensibly linger on its fringes, enabling small galleries and alternative, nonprofit arts spaces to flourish. Indeed, the ever-expanding popularity of contemporary art—underwritten by the city's many investment bankers, hedge-fund managers, real estate developers, and entrepreneurs, whose pockets have for years been overflowing—has meant that even those galleries cultivating a more renegade, anticommercial stance have sold enough to keep the doors open and, on top of that, turn a tidy profit.

Geographically speaking, this dynamic is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the continued burgeoning of the Lower East Side arts scene. While spaces like Participant Inc., Reena Spaulings Fine Art, Orchard, Canada, Rivington Arms, and Miguel Abreu Gallery are still mainstays of the area—to name only a few of

the first- and second-wave pioneers to arrive in the neighborhood since 2001 (when it was considered a strange aftershock of the '80s East Village)—a whole additional slew of modestly scaled commercial venues emerged in the past twelve months, integrating almost invisibly into the still-eclectic grit of Chinatown or else the quickly gentrifying blocks just north of it. There are, for example, new upstart enterprises like RENTAL—which, as the name suggests, hosts rotating shows by out-of-town galleries—as well as Sunday NYC, Smith-Stewart, and the relocated Luxe Gallery. All of them exude a spunky determination, using every square inch of their barely-bigger-than-a-bread-box spaces to showcase emerging figures; and in an LES context where art venues seem embedded in the comings and goings of ordinary life, it's an approach that gives welcome relief from the too often monotonous grandeur of that Art Mall to its west. But, of course, one cannot help but wonder how long this environment will last: While existing architectural structures and zoning regulations will forestall any immediate replication of Chelsea in the area, satellite branches of more established enterprises, including Lehmann Maupin Gallery, Salon 94 Freemans, and Eleven Rivington (an outpost of midtown's Greenberg Van Doren Gallery), are already beginning to appear alongside these galleries' fledgling efforts. And with the opening of the New Museum on the Bowery this month, the Lower East Side is sure to be fully consecrated as a necessary, no-longer-underground part of the circuit.

This very dynamic, of course, inevitably leads one to consider whether the same economic forces that allowed for such a blossoming of activity have also made it ever more difficult for artists themselves to live and work in the city. For while the Lower East Side is booming not only in art but in real estate—as was, and continues to be, the case in the transformation of both Williamsburg and Chelsea—the same is true, in a sense, of Bushwick. And there's the rub: With each passing year, more visual and performing artists are unable to find affordable studio and rehearsal space, regularly getting kicked out of their longtime rentals throughout Brooklyn (to say nothing of Manhattan), clearing the way for upscale condos. In other words, if 2007 was a banner year for the economics of art in New York, it was, unfortunately, a banner year for a kind of exodus as well, with artists no longer just decamping to the next few stops on the L train



Opposite page: *Kill Hardy and Stefan Tylkarski, Bear Life, 2007*. Performance view, *Petera Szpalska's Five Art, New York, 2007*, from Kim Gordon and Jutta Koether, "Devo Always," 2007. This page, clockwise from top: Ryan Recartin, *I-Be Area, 2007*, still from a color video, 1 hour 48 minutes; Michael Rakowitz, *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist, 2007*, packaging, newspapers, and glue, installation view, Lombard-Freid Projects, New York; Chen Qilin, *Garven, 2007*, stills from a color video, 14 minutes 45 seconds.

but, more dramatically, picking up shop and moving upstate, or to Berlin, or to that out-of-town teaching job, or (the best option, in my opinion) to the affordable loft spaces of Philadelphia. This suggests a cautionary tale for our city: Unless something starts to give in 2008, we risk ending up a metropolis filled with art but lacking in artists.

In fact, more than one of the year's highlights in New York came from artists who decided to forgo creative life in Gotham. Ryan Recartin, for example, did just that, choosing to work in Philadelphia lofts with a tribe of friends and colleagues to produce a distinctive, over-the-top, DIY brand of video making for the YouTube generation. For his September solo show at Elizabeth Dee Gallery, he premiered *I-Be Area, 2007*, a video filled with a glittery chaos of visual effects and colorful characters—literally, given their dramatically painted faces and creative costuming—and whose elusive, layered narratives touch on themes of identity, ranging from questions of replication and cloning to community and family. (Recartin's work, like that of his artistic peers Paper Rad and Kalup Linzy, is both a product and a reflection of Internet and television culture mixed with performance—displaying a low-tech aesthetic of one-stop-shopping video making that is ever more prevalent with today's democratic ease of digital production. His flamboyant, rough-hewn theatricality, on the other hand, is clearly indebted to the likes of John Waters, Jack Smith, and Kenneth Anger.) And in another of the year's strongest shows, Michael Rakowitz (a New Yorker recently relocated to Chicago) presented *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist* at Lombard-Freid Projects. Using both the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute database and Interpol's website, Rakowitz has been conducting research on the more than 7,000 archaeological artifacts looted from the National Museum of Iraq in the aftermath of the American invasion in April 2003—making, in turn, papier-mâché replicas of the ancient objects out of packaging from Middle Eastern food products and Arabic newspapers. Memorials to history now irretrievably

If 2007 was a banner year for the economics of art in New York, it was, unfortunately, a banner year for a kind of exodus as well.

lost, dozens of these objects were exhibited alongside traditional museum labels and accompanying texts detailing information about their origins, the events surrounding the invasion, and the key players at the Baghdad institution.

But most pertinent to an understanding of New York's rapidly changing cultural landscape might have been, paradoxically enough, a video capturing what is being irreparably lost in another country, on the other side of the world. The subject of a solo show this year at Max Protetch Gallery, Chen Qilin, a young artist from China, creates performance-based videos that address the psychological consequences of her country's rapid urbanization—particularly those related to the Three Gorges Dam project, which has resulted in the progressive displacement and relocation of more than a million people. The artist typically recruits a large cast—as is the case with several videos shot in the rubble of the now-demolished village in which she was born—and then often assumes the role of the protagonist in videos centered around theatrical rituals staged in symbolically significant locations. Somehow avoiding the common pitfalls of cloying sentimentality and documentary didacticism, Chen's best works rather miraculously track the sensibility of a society having to renegotiate

lost, dozens of these objects were exhibited alongside traditional museum labels and accompanying texts detailing information about their origins, the events surrounding the invasion, and the key players at the Baghdad institution.

But most pertinent to an understanding of New York's rapidly changing cultural landscape might have been, paradoxically enough, a video capturing what is being irreparably lost in another country, on the other side of the world. The subject of a solo show this year at Max Protetch Gallery, Chen Qilin, a young artist from China, creates performance-based videos that address the psychological consequences of her country's rapid urbanization—particularly those related to the Three Gorges Dam project, which has resulted in the progressive displacement and relocation of more than a million people. The artist typically recruits a large cast—as is the case with several videos shot in the rubble of the now-demolished village in which she was born—and then often assumes the role of the protagonist in videos centered around theatrical rituals staged in symbolically significant locations. Somehow avoiding the common pitfalls of cloying sentimentality and documentary didacticism, Chen's best works rather miraculously track the sensibility of a society having to renegotiate





are many shared philosophical and aesthetic concerns that warrant consideration.

For example: Practically everyone in the art world is familiar with the Wooster Group, Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysterical Theater, and the Judson Dance Theater, all of which came of age in the more intimate urban settings of the late '60s and '70s. Relatively few, however, are aware of the younger figures who have emerged since the '90s in the wake of these groups, and who are similarly rooted in a cross-section of installation, video, and performance-art traditions in addition to those of theater and dance. The Wooster Group and Richard Foreman, for instance, are the progenitors of such vital theater ensembles as Radiobole and Caden Manson/Big Art Group—both of which, in noteworthy live works made in the past year, wedded a lavish, low-tech, baroque visuality to layered narratives in a manner that immediately brings Trecartin, for one, to mind. Led by Manson (who creates his ensemble works at a place he maintains outside Philadelphia), the Big Art Group often situates closed-circuit cameras amid the action—Manson refers to his performances as “real-time films”—so that actors appear both onstage and on larger-

its relationships with a rich cultural past in the face of a national identity, cultivated by the government, that is intended to represent modern technological power and corporate grandeur.

I draw this comparison between Chen's work and New York because the city's cultural heritage seems in such dynamic flux, and while the sense of transition here is hardly as extreme as in Chen's China, it goes without saying that shifting cultural conditions affect production in meaningful ways: Even beyond the question of New York's affordability for artists, long gone is the time that a smaller scene in the experimental per-

formance-art traditions in addition to those of theater and dance. The mix featured performers shrouded in pink-sequined Abu Ghaib-like hoods; references to television tabloid and news shows, in addition to B horror movies; and borrowed dialogue from online pickup chatrooms.

For its part, Radiobole (a tight-knit ensemble made up of Erin Douglass, Eric Dyer, Scott Halvorsen Gillette, and Maggie Hoffman) generates outrageous productions with riotous displays of props, inexplicably captivating pranks, and perplexing plots inspired by influences ranging from *Godzilla* movies and spaghetti westerns to Guy Debord. (“Avant-vaudeville mixed with Richard Foreman” is how one friend described their style to me.) Earlier in the year they presented *Fluke*—an adaptation (of sorts) of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*—in their tiny Williamsburg garage of a space, dubbed the Collapsible Hole. Having crammed the stage with a jury-rigged junkyard set (resourcefully evoking life at sea), the cast painted eyes onto their eyelids in front of a live audience and then performed nearly the entire play with their real eyes closed, mingling the bizarrely awkward body language one might expect with moments of surprising, rehearsed agility—all while viewers were alternately laughing and feeling deep unease at the raucous stunt.

Even the more established theater groups this year warranted consideration in the art-world context, however. Stylishly distilled in its uses of appropriation, simulation, fracturing, and repetition—all strategies deeply familiar to art audiences today—was the Wooster Group's production of *Hamlet* with troupe member Scott Shepherd as the lead. Based on the movie version of the Shakespearean play's 1964 Broadway production, in which Richard Burton played the lead, the Wooster remake brings together live performers onstage and a manipulated

It is a great paradox of the current scene that more interdisciplinary work is being made than ever, yet there is an inadvertent parochialism among artists and audiences alike.

forming and visual arts here allowed for natural dialogue among practitioners from different fields, be they video, music, dance, or theater.

The sheer vastness of the New York context seems to limit this type of conversation, even though performing and visual artists alike would benefit from a broader, more fluid understanding of one another's issues, accomplishments, and challenges. Indeed, it is a great paradox of the current scene in New York that more interdisciplinary work is being made than ever, yet there is insufficient exchange among artists coming out of distinct traditions—a situation engendering an inadvertent parochialism among artists and audiences alike, and unintentionally reinforcing disciplinary boundaries in turn. The fact is that even if the venues, participants, and audiences for performance-related disciplines might seem to operate in a parallel universe, separate from the art world, these



"ghost" of the film, which is projected onto the screen behind them. Throughout the show, performers echo aspects of the film, replicating stance, staging, tone, and gesture. The palimpsest of past and present, sound and image, makes it a *Hamlet* experience like no other, in that the production isn't about *Hamlet* at all, but rather about the fleeting uniqueness of live performance and the dominance of our media culture today: The stinging truth of our TiVo times is that greater comfort seems to lie in the distanced repetition of what we already know.

It must be said here that Shepherd, with his astonishing charisma and effortless stamina, seems to have single-handedly turned acting into the latest incarnation of virtuosic endurance art. He also starred in the Brooklyn-based ensemble Elevator Repair Service's production of *Gate*, a six-and-a-half-hour tour de force involving (in part) a reading by Shepherd of *The Great Gatsby* from cover to cover. Due to conflicts with the F. Scott Fitzgerald estate, the production has yet to appear officially in New York, but this year it has traveled around the world (including Philadelphia) to unanimous acclaim. A direct offspring of the Wooster Group in many respects, but with its own distinctive generational qualities, Elevator Repair Service draws inspiration from multiple sources, creating productions as an ensemble, like Radiobole, that are inspired by odd combinations of found texts mixed with unusual choreography, low-tech props, imaginative sound tracks, and a wicked dose of whip-smart humor. In *Gate*, Shepherd's character arrives one morning at his shabby, rundown office, where he finds an old copy of the famous novel amid the clutter on his desk and starts to read aloud from it—and then doesn't stop. Each word of Fitzgerald's is preserved but also transformed as Shepherd's coworkers go about their business, ignoring his behavior, until odd coincidences between the book's plot and the actions onstage start to surface. The results are mesmerizing, being true to the text in a verbatim way but transforming the classic novel—by shifting the context around the reading—into something strange and bewildering even within its own conjured dramatic world.

Bringing such works into art-world situations, and vice versa, and subsequently mingling these various publics would only enrich our understanding of what was perhaps the most pronounced trend within the art world during the past year: the growing presence not only of performance-based video work but also of live performance within alternative contexts, ranging from venues such as Anthology Film Archives, Artists Space,

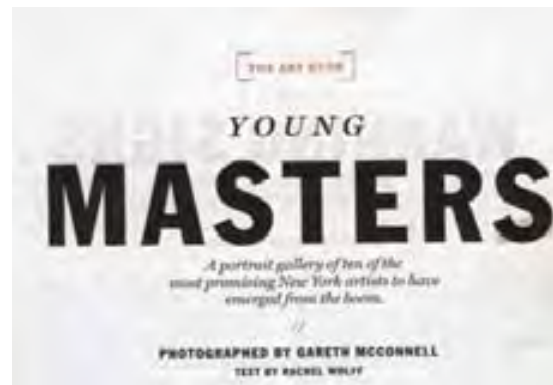
and Participant Inc. to galleries like Greene Naftali Gallery, Elizabeth Dee Gallery, Taxter & Spengemann, John Connelly Presents, Foxy Production, Reena Spaulings Fine Art, Zach Feuer Gallery (LFL), and Miguel Abreu Gallery, among others. The events themselves also tend to take various forms, ranging from simply staged dance performances to live music by local bands to solo theatrical excursions to "performance art" in the more historical sense of the term. Adding to the synergistic spirit is the second rendition of the multi-venue Performa biennial, dedicated to live performance by, or related to, visual artists.

But to consider again the question of New York "on the ground": That there is such a mélange of activity—each component of which brings its own enthusiastic followers in tow—might also be understood as testifying to a recognized need in New York for more intimate settings of dialogue and exchange. And if so, this desire comes with a certain peril. Without taking a larger cultural context into account, all these activities within the art world risk being put merely in the service of creating distinctive social scenes, galvanizing the energy that live events generate for individualized purposes. Live performance could be so much more than that, even offering a small communal resistance to the totalizing economic forces at play in the city and creating a kind of underground in public. □

DEBRA SINGER IS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CHIEF CLERK OF THE KITCHEN IN NEW YORK. (SEE CONTRIBUTORS.)



Opposite page, from top: Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, performed by the Wooster Group in a production directed by Elizabeth LeCompte, 2007. Performance view, Public Theater, New York. *Hamlet* (Scott Shepherd). Photo: Paula Court, Radiobole, Miami, 2006. Performance view, Collapsing moon, Brooklyn, New York, 2007. This page, clockwise from top left: Performance by Bunny Love, Bomb! the Mephisto, and Eric Schreinerberger in the Annex Room as part of assume what astro-focus's exhibition "A Very Anxious Feeling," John Connelly Presents, New York, 2007. Anthony Coleman performing Robert Ashley's *Entrance* (1965), Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York, July 26, 2007. Oliver Hussain, *Runes for Five Nights*, 2007. Performance view, Greene Naftali Gallery, New York, 2007. Photo: Sam Pridler.



Ryan Trecartin, 26

VIDEO AND SCULPTURE ARTIST

"I have that high-school thing of really believing that everything is art," says Trecartin, whose campy, candy-colored installations are ripe with convoluted plots, existential one-liners, sexual misadventure, and an acute understanding of the fading line between actual and virtual life. "There's a whole posse around Ryan of young artists who look up to him," says former New Museum curator Rachel Greene. But she doesn't think we'll see many artists quite like him, and the art world seems to agree: Trecartin showed in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, and seven of his works now sit in Charles Saatchi's collection of up-and-comers.

Ryan Trecartin, 26

VIDEO AND SCULPTURE ARTIST

"I have that high-school thing of really believing that everything is art," says Trecartin, whose campy, candy-colored installations are ripe with convoluted plots, existential one-liners, sexual misadventure, and an acute understanding of the fading line between actual and virtual life. "There's a whole posse around Ryan of young artists who look up to him," says former New Museum curator Rachel Greene. But she doesn't think we'll see many artists quite like him, and the art world seems to agree: Trecartin showed in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, and seven of his works now sit in Charles Saatchi's collection of up-and-comers.