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ELIZA RYAN



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NICHOLAS HUNT/NEW MUSEUM



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At top, works at the New Museum show include an installation by Josh Kline, which involves face-mapping software. Above, from left, the painter Avery K. Singer; Ryan Trecartin and Lauren Cornell, the triennial's curators; and the Argentine artist Eduardo Navarro.

Where virtual equals being real

New Museum show casts a queasy eye onto an ever more digital society

BY RANDY KENNEDY

It is early 2009. Hope and change are in the air. President Obama stands before the camera delivering his Inaugural Address, but within seconds something seems off. The speech is not the pragmatic one he gave on that cold January day but a fiery message in which he exorcises “peddlers of hate whose stock-in-trade is xenophobia, homophobia, racism, sexism and isolationism, and who define America by our differences rather than our common bonds.”

As he speaks, his face seems to be slipping digitally, and disturbingly, around his skull, and you suddenly realize it is not the president but an actor who has had the president's portrait software-mapped uncertainly to his own face.

The video is the creation of Josh Kline, a 35-year-old New York artist. And his Philip K. Dick vision of an alternate past wishfully conjuring an alternate present provides a fitting window onto the ambitions of the New Museum's 2015 Triennial, a show that will take on the widely debated and often misunderstood ideas of “posthuman” and “post-Internet” art as squarely as any American museum has.

Opening Feb. 25, the exhibition includes about 50 artists and collectives

from more than two dozen countries, many of whom have never shown in the United States and whose work casts a queasy science-fiction eye onto an ever more digital, more automated, more omniscient society.

The show, the third iteration of the museum's emerging-art triennial, has been highly anticipated in part because of its two curators — Lauren Cornell, a former director of Rhizome, the Internet-focused art organization, and Ryan Trecartin, whose video work has always seemed to exist at least a dozen years in the future, where identity, language and humanity itself have become as gleefully anarchic as a 14-year-old's social-media feed.

The show is titled “Surround Audience,” Mr. Trecartin's effort to capture that sense of a wired world in which, as Ms. Cornell put it, “technology and late capitalism have been absorbed into our bodies and altered our vision of the world.”

For many of the show's younger artists, the Internet and the digital revolution are no longer just the tools and delivery system for their work but the air they breathe and the world they see before their eyes. That also means that while the digital might not be formally present at all in some of the work, it still hovers sociologically and politically on every side.

“I think I look at the way things are changing more from an optimistic standpoint, and Lauren tends to see it more from a dystopian one, but the older I get the more complicated my own views

get,” said Mr. Trecartin, 34, who told *The New Yorker* magazine last year: “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.”

In an essay for a show last year called “Art Post-Internet” at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing, the curators Karen Archey and Robin Peckham tried to find some consensus about

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the kind of art that Mr. Trecartin and other young artists have brought to attention in recent years, writing that “post-Internet refers not to a time ‘after’ the Internet but rather to an Internet state of mind — to think in the fashion of the network.”

By that definition, most of the artists in the triennial seem to be fully in a “post” world, one without much abstract painting (there is none in the show) but lots of representations of bodies yearning to leave human form, in ways that science-fiction novelists and philosophers have been imagining for years.

The posthuman has become more pre-

valent in pop culture, too — in movies like “Her” (man falls in love with operating system) and “Transcendence” (man becomes one with the Internet), but 21st-century artists can move with a nimbleness that often puts them in touch with the implications of technological change before the culture at large.

Casey Jane Ellison, a Los Angeles stand-up comic and artist in the triennial, creates video routines using digital avatars that vaguely resemble her but sometimes look more like Max Headroom. Antoine Catala, a French artist working in New York, has made previous work consisting of drones that fly around a space, analyzing the images in it and reciting descriptions of them in a mechanical voice. Daniel Steegmann Mangrané, a Spanish artist working in Brazil, has conceived an installation in which museum visitors will wear a version of the Oculus Rift virtual-reality headset and be transposed into a representation of the rapidly disappearing Mata Atlántica rain forest in Brazil.

There will be paint on canvas in the show, though most of it by artists immersed in the digital, like Avery K. Singer, a figurative painter in New York who often depicts comically simple robot-like figures that she creates in virtual 3-D space using a SketchUp animation program.

There also will be work by artists that addresses the technological revolution only by seeking to deny it as thoroughly as possible. Eduardo Navarro, an Argentine artist who has worked with medita-

tion and trance, is creating a work called “Timeless Alex,” in which a performer will meditate for days to try to enter the mind-state of a turtle and then wear a handmade turtle shell and creep across the city. Mr. Navarro, who describes turtles as “the opposite of the Internet,” explained one morning in a studio adjacent to the New Museum, where he has been creating the turtle shell, that part of the aim is to suggest a conception of time probably always inconceivable to humans but now certainly so.

“If it's boring to watch, I think that will be better because watching a turtle can be very boring,” he said, speaking quite slowly, as if already trying to get on reptile time. “I like the idea that turtles are not even aware of their own longevity.”

In an interview at the museum, after travels that took her, nonvirtually, to more than two dozen countries in search of emerging artists, Ms. Cornell, 36, said: “I think there is this kind of expectation, because Ryan and I are the curators, that the show is going to be all holograms and that we're going to fly in on U.F.O.s. But it's because there are still pretty simplistic ways of thinking about art in the digital age. That kind of online-offline binary that used to exist about art made with technology or the Internet as a factor doesn't really exist anymore.”

Mr. Kline is one of many artists in the show who look into the darker depths of contemporary society — surveillance, *NEW MUSEUM, PAGE 19*