

A high-speed whirlwind of ... what? At the Power Plant Ryan Trecartin's chatter-filled art spurs more of the same

Murray Whyte Visual Arts

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

There's a moment in Ryan Trecartin's 2009 work *Sibling Topics* (Section A) - or maybe it was *K-CoreallINC. K, or P. opular S.ky* (section ish); who can remember? - where Ceadar, one of four bronze-painted, transgendered quadruplets bleats, in his/her constant state of manic pique, that "I want a culture landfill ... so I can empty out my culture can!" Or maybe it was sister Britt. Or Adobe. Or maybe Deno. Trecartin plays all of them. Who can tell?

At the Rhode Island School of Design, Trecartin studied video editing, and his gifts are nothing short of superhuman. He's the art world poster-child for social networking: In 2005, a friend posted one of his movies on Friendster (Betamax to Facebook's VHS); by 2006, Trecartin was in the Whitney Biennale. In 2009, he was included in the New Museum in New York's "Younger Than Jesus" show; he was universally declared a standout among the 50 under-33's there.

They've served the occasion brilliantly, constructing seven rooms, one for each movie, in a sort of Ryan Trecartin funhouse that mirrors his interior worlds. That he has created a new four-part series of movies for this show is just as significant (called, together, "Re'Search Wait's," it is vaguely about hyper-invasive market research, though you'd need a few viewings to extract any sense of it).

FULL TEXT

There's a moment in Ryan Trecartin's 2009 work *Sibling Topics* (Section A) - or maybe it was *K-CoreallINC. K, or P. opular S.ky* (section ish); who can remember? - where Ceadar, one of four bronze-painted, transgendered quadruplets bleats, in his/her constant state of manic pique, that "I want a culture landfill ... so I can empty out my culture can!" Or maybe it was sister Britt. Or Adobe. Or maybe Deno. Trecartin plays all of them. Who can tell?

Anyway, mission accomplished: Opening at the Power Plant this week are seven movies - his word - that make up "Any Ever," the overarching project for Trecartin, who, at just 28, has been anointed a bona fide international art-world darling. And on first blush, the Power Plant show appears to be the slickly toxic landfill Ceadar (or ... anyway) was wishing for.

Trecartin's worlds are interior nowherescapes: Generic rooms filled with disposable IKEA-esque furniture, junk food and booze, holes smashed through drywall; or in bland economy cars, where characters blather incessantly - though they do that everywhere - pausing to grope, make out, or vomit (Ceadar again; sorry, honey).

Images of junk culture dazzle and swirl in a rapid-fire churn of text, colour, and high-speed chatter. Corporate logos float in and out; characters are stylized absurdist hyperboles - gruesomely comic attention hounds whose main concerns seem to be addressing each other, and themselves, through you, the ever-present camera.

And then there's the talking - endless, incessant, high-speed nattering, like a dental drill aimed at your frontal lobe, interrupted occasionally for the faux-profundity of a non-sequitur: "I am totally against destination as a concept," says a female character in black bondage gear, reclining on a bed of sand in a suburban rec room. In the back of a generic hatchback, Ceadar squawks: "I don't want to be involved with being narrated - ever."

Depending on your surfing habits, this may all seem weirdly familiar. Trecartin's not emptying anything into the culture landfill so much as skimming its most recent castoffs. His movies are a fortified brew of our look-at-me, hyperlinked society, from amateurish vamping on YouTube to the compulsive look-at-me world of Facebook to reality TV to internet porn ("I watch a lot of bad stuff," Trecartin shrugged, smiling, at a talk last week). He not only mines this vein, but distills it to a near-intolerable concentration. Speaking with him, he didn't mind the idea of viewers drifting in and out - "surfing the vibe," as he put it, even though he goes to great pains to construct multiple narrative threads through each movie that occasionally spill over (Ceadar and family recur multiply, hence the confusion).

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That the Power Plant has corralled Trecartin for what might be his most ambitious exhibition ever is a coup, and a big flag for the gallery on the international art map.

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Still, star power has a necessary says-who element, and there's a history of youthful savants being anointed by an art-world establishment no longer sure it can see the future. There's also a natural urge to see his movies as hypercritical, a violent parody of a vapid attention-deficit society bound for ruin. (For his part, Trecartin has already adopted the canny ambivalence of a longtime superstar, careful not to position his work as particularly for, against or about anything.)

There's possibly as great an urge, judging from some chats I've had, to dismiss Trecartin as so much juvenile wanking. But I suspect that opinion will be confined to the older-than-Jesus generations. Trecartin has not only art-world cred, but mass appeal; to legions of youthful fans, the movies are less art than wildly inventive, utterly hilarious entertainment - a recognizable, if extreme world of tech-driven me-me-me culture they live in.

That Trecartin is comfortable with both, or either, category might be his real distinction. As he put it to a Toronto audience recently, "I think we're becoming more human because we're able to embarrass ourselves and share more easily, and this kind of violent act of curating yourself ... I like exploring how positive that can be."

Can Trecartin see the future? No. But he can propose one. In a virtual world, what's the difference?

Credit: Murray Whyte Visual Arts Reporter

Illustration

Caption: A moment from Ryan Trecartin's K-CoreallINC. K in which familiar online chatter comes overwhelmingly to life. /

DETAILS

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