





# 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*