

"2015 Triennial: Surround Audience"



Benoit Pailley  
Installation view of "2015 Triennial: Surround Audience"

As everyone expected, the New Museum's third triennial of youngish artists—curated by new-media maven Lauren Cornell and artist Ryan Trecartin, whose own frenetic, extended video selfies were a hit of the first Triennial—abounds with digitized avatars in one form or another. The showstopper, Frank Benson's seductively hyperreal sculpture *Juliana*, was rendered from a 3-D scan of transgender artist Juliana Huxtable (whose photographic self-portraits nearby unfortunately pale in comparison). Seen reclining nude on a pedestal, she exudes an exoticism that arises as much from her otherworldly metallic sheen as it does her unconventional combination of sexual features. Yet a nagging resemblance to Jean-Paul Goude's images of Grace Jones raises unexamined questions about Benson's work within a history of white artists representing shiny black bodies—and also, why so many artists in the show seem unaware of the wheels they reinvent.

Happily, a number of works look outward instead of narcissistically inward. Josh Kline's room-filling installation, *Freedom*, centers on a video of an uncanny President Obama, created with face-substitution software, giving the defiant inaugural speech we'd all wished for. Close by, under cell-phone trees with credit-card leaves, life-size Teletubbies in riot gear sport tablet devices playing loops of actual cops reading civilian Twitter feeds, some taken from Occupy Wall Street. Kline's evocation of aspirational politics, malleable identities and the control of the surveillance state proves chilling, heady and, paradoxically, hopeful.

Despite the exhibition's metaphoric and literal noise (very few works can be seen without hearing a soundtrack bleeding in from another), a few artists manage to provide oases of relative quiet. Basim Magdy's magic-realist film *The Dent* and Lisa Tan's literary and museological video *Waves*, each induce hypnotic, poetic states of quiet contemplation—an experience that the world has in increasingly short supply, if the busy juvenilia of "Surround Audience" is any guide. —Joseph R. Wolin