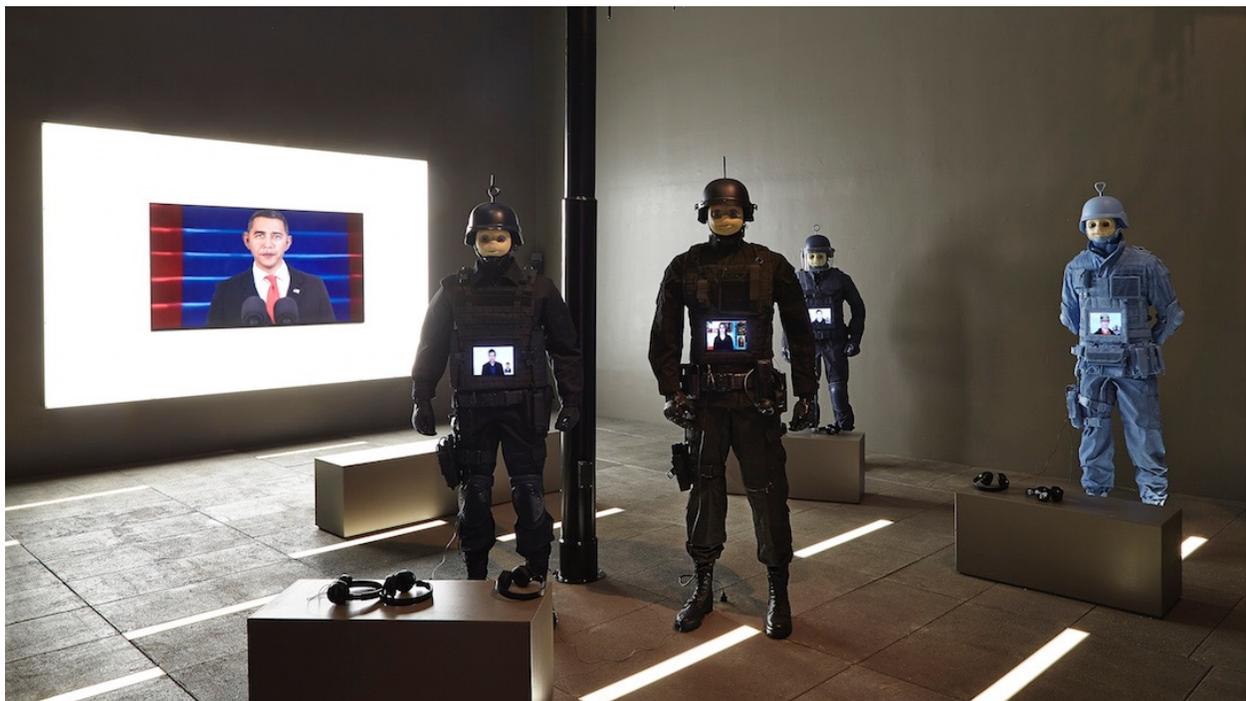


REVIEWS MAY 01, 2015

New Museum Triennial

NEW YORK,
at New Museum

by Austin Considine



View of Josh Kline's multimedia installation *Freedom*, 2015, in the New Museum Triennial.

I couldn't spend time at the New Museum's third Triennial until the Thursday after it opened, once the biggest week on New York's art calendar was under way. I feared the exhibition's impact might get lost for me amid the glut of the Armory Show and other fairs. But the best parts of the Triennial proved a welcome, if complicated, reprieve. Titled "Surround Audience," the show focuses heavily on work that reflects a climate in which hyper-connectivity and new technologies have redefined the roles and practices of artists, leading to what many have cursorily labeled "post-Internet" art. Refreshingly earnest, if at times overly didactic, the show reminded me that art-making can still be a critical, uncynical act—a pursuit that surpasses the market-oriented hustle so nakedly on view that week.

Like the Triennial's first two iterations, this edition exhibits work by young artists (many of the 51 participants are under 30, all but a few under 40) of diverse origin, gender and practice. Most remarkable is how aggressively political much of it is. A generation ago, the most valued currency among young artists seemed to be irony—as cool and detached as a cloven shark suspended in blue formaldehyde. Hip aloofness hasn't disappeared entirely among the artists selected by co-curators Lauren Cornell, of the New Museum, and artist Ryan Trecartin, but it is relatively rare.

Li Lao's ground-floor installation, *Consumption* (2012), which documents his 45-day employment at Foxconn, a Chinese factory that produces Apple devices and a disturbing number of worker suicides, exemplifies the politicism that runs throughout the show. Kiluanji Kia Henda's photographic series "Rusty Mirage (The City Skyline)," 2013, does the same, with its images of empty iron frames erected in the desert that parody the new skylines of burgeoning commercial capitals like Luanda, in the artist's home country of Angola, and their attendant inequalities.

Expanding inequality is not, of course, exclusive to developing countries. U.S. artist Josh Kline's installation *Freedom* (2015) presents viewers with human-size Teletubbies dressed as SWAT police, broadcasting videos from their bellies of retired police officers, digitally cloaked with face-substitution software, reciting paranoid and dissociated monologues assembled from anonymous social-media feeds. In an adjacent video in the installation, an uncanny, digitally constructed Barack Obama delivers a fictional diatribe on the financial abuses that caused the 2008 recession, giving the sort of speech his early activist supporters have likely craved, but haven't received.

Works like these demonstrate that the label "post-Internet" describes less a style than a generational crisis. As artist and writer Jesse Darling noted in her 2014 essay "Post Whatever: On Ethics, Historicity, & the #usermilitia": "Every artist working today is a post-internet artist." The term "post," she asserts, paraphrasing visual-culture theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff, "should not be understood as 'the successor to,' but as 'the crisis of.'" We haven't moved beyond the shock of Patriot Act e-surveillance, Twitter revolutions, on-demand entertainment and what *Wired* has called "the quantified self." "Post-Internet" isn't just about GIF-making; it's about living post-Snowden, post-Arab Spring, post-Napster, post-biometrics.

Selves inhabiting that world can feel malleable, fragmented, dehumanized; a sense pervades the exhibition that these selves have become inseparable from the mediums they use to communicate (and which, in turn, commodify) their desires. For example, artist and comic Casey Jane Ellison, whose irreverent online talk show, "Touching the Art," has been an art-world favorite, contributed pieces in which she transformed herself into both a 3-D-printed USB drive and a self-involved video avatar delivering stand-up.

Such humorous works, of course, veer at times toward the kind of cynicism largely absent from the show. Artist collective K-Hole, known for making branding reports as art, contributed ads for the Triennial that read, for instance, "No Past No Present No Problem" and "Sex. Gossip. Success." The DIS collective appropriated the aesthetics of a home-decor catalogue to create *The Island (KEN)*, 2015: a hybrid kitchen-and-shower module upon which, at scheduled points in the show, clothed women get drenched, sip cocktails and fondle vegetables, all while lying down, as the design requires. It's a witty piece, but if appropriating consumer imagery was ever an effective critique of capitalism (and that's debatable), it certainly seems compromised when Red Bull, a real-estate company and Jeffrey Deitch sponsor the work, as is the case with DIS's installation. DIS and K-Hole have squared the circle of their audience's potential critique, however; the impossibility of art's escaping capitalist co-optation is central to their work. Still, it's depressing to see resignation so openly embraced.

The Triennial, for all its cerebral challenges, often comes up short on aesthetic impact. There are exceptions, including self-portraits by Juliana Huxtable—colorful, saturated photographic experiments in self-definition that recall Cindy Sherman's work. In one said to reference Nuwaubian cosmology, the artist, who is transgender, poses nude, her dark skin tone here a lush, greenish hue. Frank Benson's adjacent nude sculpture of Huxtable, *Juliana* (2015), 3-D-printed and bathed in gorgeous, iridescent paint, has rightly become an icon of the exhibition for both its beauty and its frankness. A handful of other pieces—like Antoine Catala's coral sculpture in a glowing fish tank and Sascha Braunig's surrealistic paintings of vaguely human figures—likewise offer visually rich experiences. As invigoratingly political and engaged as so much of the Triennial is, I craved more encounters like these, with lasting aesthetic resonance.