

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS – Year in Review

Ryan Trecartin, Willem de Kooning, New York Solo Photo Shows

It seems nearly redundant to say that Ryan Trecartin's solo show "Any Ever" at MoMA PS1 was one of the most exciting and well-realized shows of the past year, but to give credit where credit is due: It was. However, much of the critical evaluations of the work failed to pinpoint its true significance. Too much was made of Trecartin's frenetic techno-wizardry and the youthful exuberance of his Warholian cohort: Finally, here was an artist who embodied the efflorescent optimism and unbounded creativity of the Internet generation! But beneath the show's beguiling surface were murky depths of madness and dystopian anxiety—it was certainly a show for our times, but Trecartin is no Tweet-talking Candide.

Less explicitly zeitgeist-oriented was MoMA's massively ambitious Willem de Kooning retrospective, which provided 2011's most poignant and affirming narrative arc. After strolling through his masterful, febrile paintings, landing in the final gallery of spare, airy canvases completed during his struggle with Alzheimer's was a revelation. Though they were not the best works in the show, the tranquility and joy that they assert in the face of mental and corporeal dissolution forefronts the affective value of a merger between art and life that is not pandering and didactic or hokily participatory, but truly embodied.

Finally, on the emerging front, this year's most exciting development came in the form of a collection of young artists making novel use of photography. Strong solo outings from Elad Lassry (Luhning Augustine), Lucas Blalock (Ramiken Crucible), Talia Chetrit (Renwick), Mariah Robertson (Museum 52), Sam Falls (Higher Pictures, West Street), and Michele Abeles (47 Canal), among others, have made it clear that the unfathomable morass of images that populates the Internet has not stagnated the medium, but merely forced artists to seek out alternate avenues. Largely eschewing the world outside in favor of digital and darkroom experimentation and the creation of still life constructions in the studio, these artists push against the environment of redundant images while acknowledging that escape may ultimately be impossible.

- Chris Wiley
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