His Nonlinear Reality, and Welcome to It

By RANDY KENNEDY

THE shoot the night before had lasted into the next day, ending around 9 a.m. after a scene in which the perimeter of the kidney-shaped swimming pool had been set ablaze with rubbing alcohol. So when the artist Ryan Trecartin greeted a visitor that afternoon, sleepless for more than 34 hours, he ran his hands through his hair and said, “This really isn’t me.”

He meant that he wouldn’t be much good for an interview. But he could just as well have been speaking in the voice of one of the manically sputtering characters he plays in the videos he has been writing and directing for the last several years, characters whose hold an identity and existence itself seems so tenuous that they must keep talking to keep from disappearing. (“If I didn’t take the liberty to give these prop knobs onto my own space, what would you think that I’d be?” demands one, in what has become Mr. Trecartin’s signature unending vernacular phrases that sound like something you might have heard before, on television or the Web, but haven’t.)

Mr. Trecartin’s latest project, as yet unfinished and untitled, extends the themes of his previous works that have been made in collaboration with his friends and colleagues from the Rhode Island School of Design. One of his works, posted on his Pricelister page, was seen in 2005 by the art critic Sue de Beer, who brought it to the attention of a curator at the New Museum in Manhattan. In unusually short order, even for an art world then still moving at breakneck speed, his work was everywhere: the 2006 Whitney Biennial, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the Saatchi Gallery in London, the collection of the Guggenheim Museum. And his more ambitious work to date, the movie-length “11:11 A.M.,” which made its debut in 2007 at the Elizabeth Dee Gallery in Chelsea, was greeted Continued on Page 30
Welcome to His Nonlinear Reality

From Page 12

Ryan Trecartin, who is working on an epic film as part of an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, is a key figure in the contemporary art world.

An unorthodox filmmaker uses the directorial techniques of a world- plunging fantasy to create a world of epic, never-ending transition.

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When asked if he had any other interests outside of his art career, Mr. Trecartin said that he had been inspired by the three-dimensional film by writers like David Foster Wallace and Don DeLillo, to describe Mr. Trecartin’s work and that of several other younger artists. But in his art, he said, “the film is more about exploring new possibilities and new directions.”

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