

Shape Twister

Video artist explores multiple realities simultaneously

by Jessica Wallenfels

When you meet video artist Ryan Trecartin, the only clue to an uproar is his cell phone: The outside face of it is cracked like a spider web, telling of some dire scrape. In person, the queer 27-year-old is contained and thoughtful, slight. But I-Be, the alter ego(s) he plays in his feature-length video *I-Be Area*, is a shifting series of huge characters in dire scrapes: a gold-faced, magenta haired, Dirty South drawing boy-man; a longhaired sex kitten shopping for a new life on the Internet. Trecartin and the rest of his extensive cast shout keywords at the camera faster than a tag-stuffed Web site through a thick filter of belligerence.



It's almost another language, which Trecartin elaborates on via e-mail: "People seem to sometimes use words and composite accents as props to propel multiple statements into a space-saving singular sentence that has to be digested using a wide range of observations from multiple knowledge angles at once."

Which brings to mind a moment in *I-Be Area*, when one character says to I-Be, "I can't translate your rant."

"Buy my Rosetta Stone," I-Be quips.

Hilarious and befuddling, with a wicked-intelligence-on-spin-cycle script, *I-Be Area* is Trecartin's follow-up to his 2006 Whitney Biennial offering, *A Family Finds Entertainment*. Production design for both melds *Pee-wee's Playhouse* with a Skittles commercial, framing a playful, anxiety-ridden scavenger hunt that explores multiple realities simultaneously.

For Trecartin, it's all informed by nonseparation between Internet life and physical life, and a fluidity of gender that's a given, not a statement. His view of gender identity abhors permanence, instead favoring a future when we can edit gender preferences like a mood, "or maybe your rising sign for the weekend."

He elaborates: "I don't think about genitals as an influence. I like a constant state of transition; for me it's mental, but I admire the physical shifters, and when surgery becomes more cosmic and less biological, I'll be participating like crazy."

Ryan Trecartin *presents I-Be Area 6:30 p.m. Sept. 6, 10 and 13 and 7:30 p.m. Sept. 7 at Whitsell Auditorium, 1219 S.W. Park Ave. Admission is \$6 for PICA members or \$7 for nonmembers.*

I-Be Area also will be screened as an ongoing installation from noon to 6 p.m. through Sept. 14 at Leftbank, 240 N. Broadway. Admission is free.