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NEXT STEPS

The future is in the hands of young artists at the New Museum

Like the show itself, the title of the New Museum's rousing triennial, "Surround Audience," succeeds on a few different levels. On the one hand, it's ominous, as if the fifty-one early-career artists and collectives had a mandate to ambush or quarantine viewers and keep them under surveillance. It also suggests a benign enveloping—the group-show equivalent of a Snuggie. The phrase is the brainchild of Ryan Trecartin, who drew raves as a fully formed star for the digital age during the museum's first triennial of emerging artists, "Younger Than Jesus," in 2009. He coörganized this edition with the perspicacious curator Lauren Cornell (who used to helm the online art haven Rhizome), with fewer new-media bells and whistles than you might think.

Granted, there's an Oculus Rift helmet from the Spanish artist Daniel Steegmann Mangrané, which plunges its wearer into the Brazilian rain forest, in underwhelming black-and-white. But there are also paintings, notably the hauntingly weird and refreshingly small oils by the Maine-based artist Sascha Braunig, pioneering a genre that could be called "post-portrait," with facelike forms limned in an irradiated, sci-fi palette. The museum lines its lower level with YouTube videos of Steve Roggenbuck's ranted-word poetry, but it also published a poetry book—a wide-ranging anthology, cheekily titled "The Animated Reader" by its editor, Brian Droitcour.