

Ryan Trecartin
K-Core/INC.K
 (section a) 2009
 video still



Trecartin's work is, in this sense, made from a position of future retrospection. Reversing the artistic trope of creating work for posterity's sake, Trecartin explicitly creates his work in the expectation that it will date. The characters in *Re'Search Wait'S* at one point shout, 'What year is it? What year is it?', while in another video, a character discusses 'my confession for year 2006'. It is a complex staging of obsolescence in which a split of perspective occurs: the subject simultaneously lodged in a present that is already seeping into the past, and a future of retrospective vision. That split is natural, given that the subject of a Trecartin film is almost always paranoid or schizophrenic.

What Trecartin skilfully illustrates, while remaining in the vernacular of his characters, is the institutions that bear down on individual subjects. He begins with corporate culture, but is equally talking about government; one video begins with Trecartin indicating a printout of the constitution, of which he says, 'This is the old constitution and I thought it was really cute.' Later, another character declares, 'The government wants us to merge' – surely a reference to Bret Easton Ellis, whose characters are in a sense a disaffected counterpoint to Trecartin's, who are, by contrast, too full of affect.

But back to that constitution. Trecartin refers to his own series of amendments, in which he has replaced God with the internet. That seems, at first, like a facile replacement, but it taps into one of Trecartin's key ideas: that we are the unconscious subjects of ideology, whether it is religion or the internet, that these systems regulate our experience, and that someone, somewhere, is always watching. The frenetic speed with which we move is a response to that surveillance – at once an act of evasion, and also of performance. ■

KATIE KITAMURA is a critic and novelist based in New York.

Outrageous Fortune: Artists Remake the Tarot

Focal Point Gallery Southend-on-Sea 4 July to 27 August

In 1973 Italo Calvino, a member of the Paris-based group of writers and mathematicians the Oulipo (an abbreviation that translates as 'workshop of potential literature'), published his short novel *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*. This work employs the imagery and procedures of a deck of Tarot cards to develop a series of quirky, recursive narratives, and is typical of the output of the Oulipo in that it uses an apparently restrictive formal structure in such a way as to generate what is an arguably vital and invigorating text. Imposing such constraints might appear to be a means of damping down the artist's supposedly unfettered creative potential, but in fact the reverse is often the case. An adherence to tightly controlled compositional rules can push creativity in unusual and exciting directions. Some 40 years after Calvino's linguistic experiment, curator Andrew Hunt, partly taking his cue from an idea by Peter Lewis, has himself drawn on the Tarot in the assembling of a large group show of around 80 artists, 'Outrageous Fortune: Artists Remake the Tarot'.

One may consider that curating, unlike the making of literature or art, needs to adhere to strictly practical *modus operandi* if it is to successfully produce a coherent presentation. Curating is a largely bureaucratic activity, dealing, of course, with the variegated and often contradictory wiles of artistic and intellectual interests at one end of its territory, but, at the other, with the material, technical and financial aspects of exhibition arrangement. Curators, it may be suggested, carry out their mundane but necessary labour so that the artist is free to play, explore and take risks in a hopefully productive manner. But

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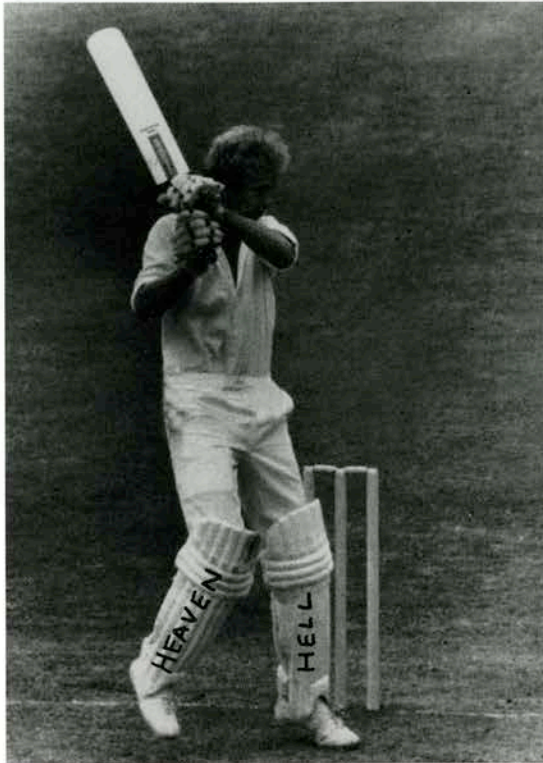
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in the case of 'Outrageous Fortune' Hunt has allowed himself a rather considerable crack at the whip of (artistic) creativity when it comes to the making of the show. With the basic idea of getting a large number of artists to provide a version of a specific Tarot card, Hunt, to get the ball rolling, asked a number of contributors to each pick a further five artists, the result being that most of the show's participants have been selected by their artistic peers, as opposed to the usual expert and master of these matters, the curator.

Furthermore, when dishing out the individual cards Hunt assigned them according to the – potentially cruel – rules of chance, a method entirely in keeping with the fickle procedures of the Tarot itself. Filling three moderately large rooms at Southend-on-Sea's Focal Point Gallery, and appropriately adjacent to the public library's reading rooms, the show adheres to the pattern that the Tarot pack itself reveals upon opening an unused set: there are images of the 21 cards of the Major Arcana, followed by the four suits constituting the Minor Arcana. On the wall of each gallery are a series or suite of cards framed behind glass and a list of artists. The works themselves, each measuring 428x285mm and in many different media, run round the walls in the same order as the cards. One can thus easily determine which artist received a given card and compare it with its equivalent from the pack displayed in the frame, as well as with two other important


Tarot decks presented in a display case in the first room of the show.

Some of the artists included in 'Outrageous Fortune' such as Susan Hiller (who has designed the reverse side of the pack), Lindsay Seers and Suzanne Treister are predictable inclusions, given that the occult is a recurring theme in their work, but it is not apparent whether it was Hunt or the artists who, in picking these figures, realised this pertinent choice. Chance can – and this is surely one of the lessons of Marcel Duchamp, John Cage and others – provide a highly significant, as opposed to merely arbitrary, result.

Occasionally two contributors have worked together on a single card (Charlotte Cullinan & Jeanine Richards, Anja Kirschner and David Panos, and others) but generally the exhibition is a paradigmatic case of art-world individualism in that it has the 'something for everyone' feel typical of large group shows. Such pluralism is in a sense merely a microcosm of the art market, and is especially self-promoting when artists opt to submit something they were already working on, forcing it to fit the exhibition brief. In this respect, Katie Paterson's almost blank piece of paper, purportedly echoing aspects of astrophysics dealt with in other of her works, is particularly irritating. The notion of the blank card would be amusing were it not so vacuous and clichéd. But the inventiveness and diversity of works is, from another perspective, impressive. Fraser Muggerridge's *Six of Wands* is a neat exercise in graphic reductionism, as is Jamie Shovlin's dark roman numeral. Michael Fullerton's photo of Vidal Sassoon as the Knave of Pentacles is eerie and apt. Keith Farquhar offers a curious red shape that is perhaps a figure from another dimension. The treated picture of Alex from *A Clockwork Orange* as the Hanged Man (Dawn Mellor) is ugly but clever, while Tatjana Doll and Sophie Van Hellerman have supplied more conventional Tarot imagery. Other artists in 'Outrageous Fortune' include Anna Barriball, Adam Chodzko, John Cussans, Will Holder, Fiona Mackay, Mike Nelson, Dan Rees, Jack Strange, Jemima Stehli, Julie Verhoeven, Stuart Whipps and Cerith Wyn Evans. Only one artist, Melanie Gilligan, submitted video work (but it fits in well), and there are at least two writers, Paul Buck and Rachel Withers. It is good to see an author and a critic in the mix.

Hunt is to publish 'Outrageous Fortune' as a pack of cards, to be freely given away, though the show itself is already a fortune-telling game as much as it is a conventional exhibition. Questions about contacts, networks, collaboration and the distribution, legacy and effects of art are raised by the entirely appropriate decision to reproduce the exhibition in this form. The Tarot, like the work of art, is a machine for making meaning. ■


PETER SUCHIN is an artist and critic.



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