

Surround Audience, New Museum Triennial Catalogue, 2015

Renaud Jerez's recent sculptures—life-size effigies composed of salvage and jerry-rigged ductwork, like viscera ossified at the moment of escaping their cavities—continue his earlier work's characterization of bodies contaminated by consumerism. Their forms both register the cyborgs of dystopian science fiction and expose the schematic infrastructure of the human body. Bandaged cables, Jacuzzi tubes, or PVC pipes perform as analogues for electronic circuits and digital networks, as well as human arteries and veins. Jerez addresses this dualism across his practice, taking up technologically conditioned gestures where mouse and joystick act as prostheses; likewise, skins are often surrogates for screens (and vice versa) in his work, activated as interfaces between organic and electronic systems.

Jerez has also expressed his fascination with «virtual skins»: superficial, transposable designs applied to software to mediate between the function of a program and its look and feel. This double entendre manifests in video works like *Gr33d L4ncôme Bl4nc 3xp3rt* (2013), which superimposes an opaque, featureless human avatar over ambiguously textured, reflective surfaces and a glossy commercial for a skin-whitening cream over an infrared scan of a human body. Radiographic imaging also plays into the related video *Hypnose Drama* (2013), in which an overhead security-type X-ray of an electronic device punctuates a synthesized advertising jingle and a slow-motion mascara commercial. The device, flat and opaque, might indeed be another screen—a transparent interface rendered solid by «noninvasive» X-ray radiation, underscoring the artist's concerns with infiltration and semi-permeable surfaces. Extending this evaluation of vision and Jerez's frequent practice of alternating anthropomorphic and technical formal counterparts, *Victim - 20 dead teens ft Hunter in the Armchair* (2013) links an anatomical eye to a surveillance apparatus. In the latter, a computer-generated oculus mimics the roving motions of a dome security camera, while images—and images of images on screens and of thumbnail printouts—of virtually modeled bodies sequentially come into focus, double, and recede on a spinning wheel, evoking file-preview animations on Apple computers.

If the contorted, evacuated bodies of Jerez's figurative sculptures expose the husks of biological systems on the brink of decay, visual references to 3-D modeling, video games, and computer-generated avatars in his videos render the artist's perspective on virtual morphology, modification, and bionics as both skeptical and seduced. Testaments of depletion, the shriveled fabric skins of Jerez's frames provide a material foil for the perpetually interchangeable, simulated facades produced on-screen. Among a group of sculptures included in the Triennial are *B* (2014), a dessicated figure seemingly made of pipes wrapped in bandages, seated in a generic office chair, and *BNWTAS* (2014), a skeletal figure affixed to the wall and dressed from the waist down in pants and sneakers, which dangle precariously from its «feet.»

One could frame Jerez's preoccupation with veneers and wrappers, in tandem with his videos' appropriation of beauty-product advertisements, as a study of the cosmetic dimensions of both identity and the contemporary visual environment more broadly. The pervasive branding and corporate marketing strategies that inflect our visual culture represent for Jerez yet another type of superficial packaging, both literally and theoretically; he strategically perforates and enhances these surfaces in video and sculptural works that appropriate logos, political motifs, and the language of advertising. While Jerez remains attuned to the violence of empty promises or manipulative propaganda contained by superficial simulations or «gimmicks», his work evinces a persistent ambivalence toward contemporary conditions for life—what science-fiction writer Samuel R. Delany calls a «cultural fugue», or the kamikaze drive toward excessive technological (and capitalist) complexity.¹ These are mixed feelings that many of his contemporaries share, complicating or even attenuating the critical capacity of their work in the traditional sense. Artists like Jerez may be more concerned with defining the new terms of physical experience in virtual space and considering ways to exploit, rather than reject, the systemic subjugation that comes with it.

K.S

¹ Samuel R. Delany, *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1984)