



Ryan Trecartin NY Times June 2011

POSSESSED A Little Respect for the Minivan

By DAVID COLMAN
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THE past is a foreign country; they do tours there now, complete with souvenirs. The late 19th century, the 1950s, the 1980s, you name it. Modern culture — fashion, music, design, television and film — offers as many eras to visit as the earth has time zones.

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SMELLY, BUT... Ryan Trecartin's car, as seen in one of his videos.

Just don't go to [Ryan Trecartin's](#) new show at MoMA PS1 in Queens looking for time travel. Described as a "game-changing exhibition" by Roberta Smith in *The New York Times*, the show is bursting with engrossingly funny videos of Mr. Trecartin's friends, dressed up and acting out in the here-and-now, like footage from an off-brand reality show or YouTube clips fed through one of the slice-and-dice machines sold on TV.



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Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times
LET IT GO Mr. Trecartin eschews the past.

These are the kinds of things Mr. Trecartin relates to — and not, say, to Ken Kesey's *Merry Pranksters* and their psychedelic schoolbus.

"There was a certain point — I think I was in high school — when I rejected all fantasies about the past," said Mr. Trecartin, 30, who grew up in Ohio. "There was so much propaganda about the past. I always felt spoon-fed the stuff. I was like: 'I don't want to hear about the '60s any more. Can't I do something now?'"

He is so committed to the new that the suburban-style seating at his show (for which he collaborated with the artist Lizzie Fitch) looks freshly bought at Target or Ikea (it was). And he is so resolute in not holding on to the past that he found it hard to name one thing to which he had real attachment.

"It's not that I'm not a thing person," he said. "I am. It's more that I'm obsessed with the idea of starting over."

Still, an Achilles' heel of sorts emerged when he was asked to name the thing he had owned the longest. That is, his minivan. He bought the 1999 [Toyota Sienna](#) in 2005, when he was living with friends in New Orleans, and he estimates that he has put 200,000 miles on it.



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It evacuated him and his friends before Katrina hit, and it has moved him to Philadelphia, Miami and Los Angeles, where he now lives, with dozens of detours in between.

"I love minivans," he said. "I feel we are obsessed with transactions and exchanges, and the minivan is a kind of access point for that. And I think people look really sexy in minivans when they don't have a family."

It has served as production vehicle, ferrying materials to and from sets, as well as a set itself, clearly visible in videos at PS1. It has been a party-mobile, filled with friends driving aimlessly in various states. Plus, Mr. Trecartin is at the forefront of the Minivan Generation, having hit consciousness in the mid-1980s, when the minivan was rolled out.

Stylish, no. Whatever shred of dignity his minivan once might have had is long gone.

"Everyone uses it," he said. "It's pretty trashed. The seats are usually in the garage. One of the front lights is smashed in. The back door doesn't open. One time we were driving to the airport, and the back window just flew off and hit a semi. We actually parked it for a while with no window, but no one ever messed with it."

It has a certain built-in defense system, though. It smells horrible. "Basically," he said, "it smells like a bunch of people did Bikram [yoga](#) and then sat in it for a while with the windows up."

This is his least favorite part.

"People don't respect it the way they should," he said. "A friend of mine has a convertible, and everyone respects his car."

Nonetheless, the freedom it has allowed him is no small thing. It has taken all kinds of disrespect and still shown up for work. Given his zeal for renewal, it's surprising that he hasn't upgraded to a fresher model. But, he said, its long service and battle scars have not demeaned its status as an object; they've proved its worth as a collaborator.

Mr. Trecartin may have sworn off sentiment, but only a fool swears off trust.

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