



WILL BROWN

**Ryan Trecartin uses video** to present a fragmented world in his offerings. He is one of the exhibition's four artists, all Philadelphians.

Art By Edward J. Sozanski

## Just one common thread in Fabric Workshop show

**R**yan Trecartin has junked the traditionally gentle paradigm of passive art for something audaciously combative. His art assaults the unwary, pummels with unrelenting visual percussion and aural raucousness until one either collapses in submission or flees the premises.

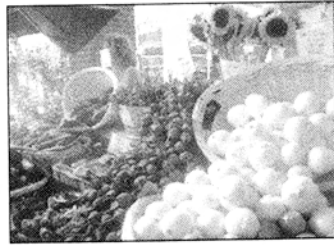
Trecartin is only five years out of Rhode Island School of Design. Yet already he has been included in

one Whitney Biennial (2006) and has been shown at the Royal Academy of Arts in London.

He's one of four Philadelphia artists the Fabric Workshop and Museum has brought together not because they investigate similar themes; they are, in fact, considerably different from one another. But they are all Philadelphians, and that's the show's principal ratio-

See **ART** on H5

## Inside

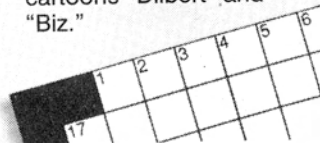


**Rick Nichols:** It's mid-May, and markets are stirring. **H10.**

**Steven Rea:** For the Lone Man, two espressos, please. **H2.**

**Books:** M. Smerconish on — himself. **H12.**

**Starting today,** Merl Reagle's crossword moves to a new full-page "Coffee Break" feature in the jobs section, along with Sudoku and the cartoons "Dilbert" and "Biz."



# Green Day's rock opera for '21st Century' generation

By Dan DeLuca  
INQUIRER MUSIC CRITIC

**W**hat *American Idiot* first suggested, *21st Century Breakdown* confirms: Billie Joe Armstrong is the Pete Townshend of the first decade of the new millennium.

Does that mean that the Green Day leader will soon be quoted as saying, "I know what it feels like to be a woman, because I am a woman," and selling his songs for car commercials and CSI spin-offs?

Let's hope not. But it does mean that Green Day's *21st Century Break-*

*down* (Reprise ★★★½) is to 2004's *American Idiot* as 1969's *Tommy*, The Who's first full-length rock opera, is to the band's nine-minute suite, "A Quick One, While He's Away." In other words, a more developed narrative song cycle.

## Review Music

Where else do the parallels lie? Well, just as *Tommy* was adapted into a Broadway musical in 1993, *American Idiot*, which has sold 12 million albums, is set to debut in September as a musical at the Berkeley Repertory Theater, hard by the band's home in Oakland, Calif.

See **GREEN DAY** on H4



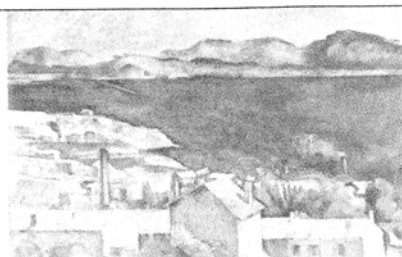
**Green Day's** latest focuses on Gloria, a hopeful idealist, and Christian, who declares that "violence is an energy."

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Art By Edward J. Sozanski

# Fabric Museum unites four kinds of Phila. artistry

ART from H1

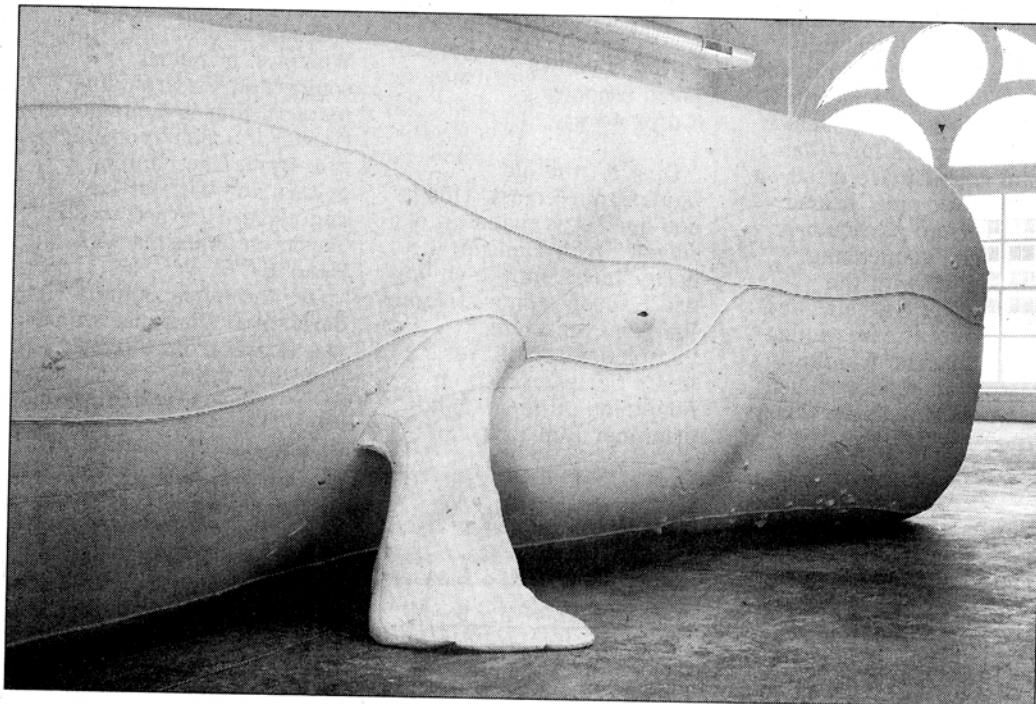
nale.

The other three artists have been highly visible locally for some years — Tristin Lowe, Virgil Marti, and Peter Rose. The first two are primarily sculptors and installation artists, while Rose and Trecartin work in video. The juxtaposition of Rose and Trecartin reveals starkly how the latter has radicalized this medium.

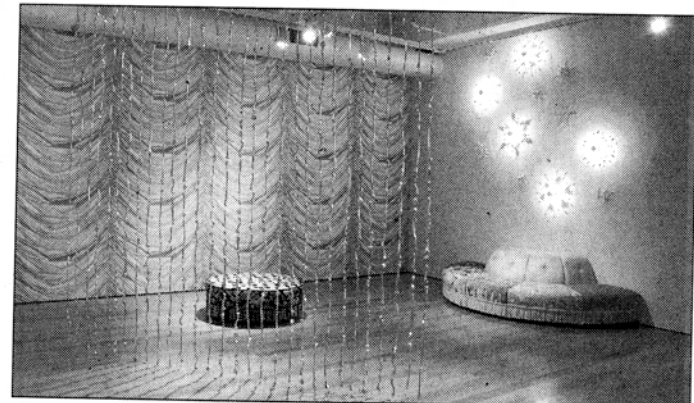
Rose has demonstrated repeatedly, as he does again in this exhibition, that he's capable of striking innovation. He uses video to illuminate layers of perception, both physical and psychological, in everyday situations.

Even when Rose's manipulations of reality are extreme, they are still plausibly connected to common experience.

Trecartin's videos describe a dystopian world so intensely confrontational, fragmented, and bizarre that one is



"Mocha Dick," Tristin Lowe's contribution to the exhibition, is a work of enormous proportions — a life-scale 52-foot-long sperm whale made of ivory-colored felt over inflatable vinyl.



Virgil Marti, a master printer at the workshop, used fabric, wallpaper, and lighting to create a balanced environment.

## Assaulted by Art

The exhibition of work by Tristin Lowe, Virgil Marti, Peter Rose, and Ryan Trecartin continues at the Fabric Workshop and Museum, 1214 Arch St. and the New

but improbable — a life-scale, 52-foot-long sperm whale, *Mocha Dick*, executed in ivory-colored industrial felt stretched over an inflatable vinyl armature.

*Mocha Dick* isn't a commercialized Disney attraction but a scientifically accurate re-

work in video. The juxtaposition of Rose and Trecartin reveals starkly how the latter has radicalized this medium.

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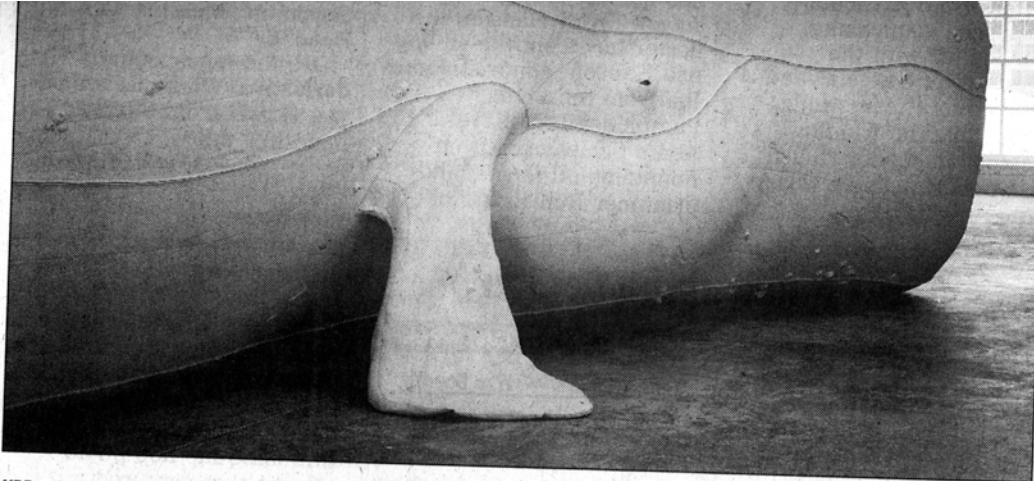
Trecartin's videos describe a dystopian world so intensely confrontational, fragmented, and bizarre that one is first puzzled, then disoriented, and finally exhausted, as if having just spent 24 hours on an alien planet.

For him and his troupe of supporting players, the medium truly is the message. It has to be so, because underlying themes are buried beneath a streaming torrent of gibberish dialogue, laser-quick scene shifts, and mind-shattering noise.

Trecartin has shifted video art into hyperdrive. Plots are impossible to follow, which might be his point. He appears to have projected contemporary life, with all its absurdities, into a future so frenetic that it makes Dada seem like Shakespeare.

He's showing three videos that are part of a projected suite of seven related films (proof enough that he's a serious and ambitious fellow). These are so manic and chaotic that they can't be described, another clue that he's charting new territory.

I can only pass along their ostensible themes — one is about the alarming and annoying proliferation of market research, another addresses the idiocies of corporate culture, and the third concerns family dynamics, in which personal interactions are ex-



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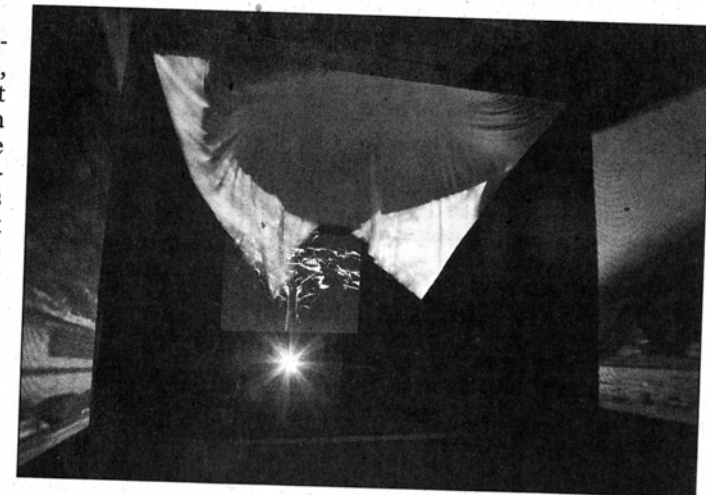
pressed in business terms.

These are all areas of concern in contemporary life, and will continue to be so. It sounds odd, but even though Trecartin (who plays multiple roles in these videos) is difficult to follow, his method is also mesmerizing in its slick technical legerdemain. One has the feeling of witnessing an aesthetic turning point, never mind what that point might be.

See Trecartin first, because you'll need to decompress afterward. The workshop has thoughtfully installed him in its so-called New Temporary Contemporary a few doors west of the main gallery.

There, you might begin with Rose's new video, *Journey to Q'xtlan*, a triptych that is more like a diptych with mirror images. The central screen displays a semi-abstract sequence in which human figures move through darkened tunnels or caverns illuminated by brief flashes of brilliant light and accompanied by deep rumblings and crashings.

One catches glimpses of natural things such as trees and a viscous red material that suggests flowing lava. The images unfold amid constant shaking, as if Rose had filmed



**Peter Rose uses video** to illuminate perception in everyday situations. This work also includes sound, fabric, and fan. WILL BROWN

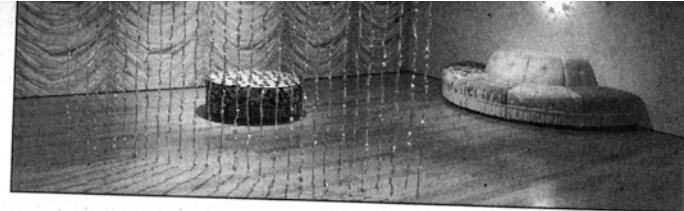
an earthquake from inside Earth. The two side screens present a more subdued secondary sequence, but as mirror images.

As you contemplate this piece, only seven minutes long, consider that you're looking at what now seems like traditional, "Old-Masterish" video art. Its effect, to stimulate contemplation, memory and imagination, is the opposite of what Trecartin achieves with his "shock-and-awe" bombardment.

Virgil Marti, a longtime master printer at the work-

shop, is known for demonstrating that the vocabulary of interior decoration — wallpaper, fabrics and lighting — can be made to serve high art. He has two installations in the exhibition, one of which is the most persuasive demonstration of this idea I have seen from him.

Marti has covered two walls of one large room with champagne-colored wallpaper silkscreened to resemble silk hung in swags. It's perfect trompe-l'oeil. Several circular and half-moon settees



**Virgil Marti, a master printer** at the workshop, used fabric, wallpaper, and lighting to create a balanced environment. WILL BROWN

## Assaulted by Art

The exhibition of work by Tristin Lowe, Virgil Marti, Peter Rose, and Ryan Trecartin continues at the Fabric Workshop and Museum, 1214 Arch St., and the New Temporary Contemporary, 1222 Arch St., through the summer. Hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Fridays and noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. Closed July 4. Admission \$3. Information: 215-561-8888 or [www.fabricworkshopandmuseum.org](http://www.fabricworkshopandmuseum.org).

ly patterned and contrasting solid-colored fabrics, which in this environment seem perfectly mated.

On the walls, Marti has installed lights within snowflake-like reliefs composed of casts of human bones. That might seem macabre, but their delicacy and symmetry override such concerns.

Another room is papered with a gridlike design adapted from photographs of Elvis Presley's gravesite memorial at Graceland. One might expect this to be garish, but in fact its mood of sentimental melancholy is demurely Victorian.

Tristin Lowe's contribution, a monumental sculpture, is a piece that would normally dominate such a group show; perhaps it does if one sees it

but improbable — a life-scale, 52-foot-long sperm whale, *Mocha Dick*, executed in ivory-colored industrial felt stretched over an inflatable vinyl armature.

*Mocha Dick* isn't a commercialized Disney attraction but a scientifically accurate recreation. If it weren't for the zipper seams — the felt covering was made in sections — you could mistake *Mocha* for one of nature's own. (The name refers to a real leviathan that attacked whalers off Chile and inspired Herman Melville.)

Lowe has given the beast lifelike barnacles on its snout and sucker scars and creases on its hide. Unfortunately, the mouth is hidden, so you can't see its squid-crunching teeth. But you can stare into its diminutive, soulful eyes.

Lowe doesn't explain what prompted him to tackle such an immense labor, executed with the workshop staff; so one is left to speculate and extrapolate. The most obvious reference is to Melville's novel and its allegorical lessons about life's travails.

Another, more immediate response is to gape in astonishment at such a natural marvel. One could never get this close to a real sperm whale, so the encounter is bound to be sobering, and memorable.

Contact contributing art critic Edward J. Sozanski at 215-854-5595 or [esozanski@phillynews.com](mailto:esozanski@phillynews.com). Read his recent work at <http://www.philly.com>.