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Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905-2016

ART OUT

by Celina Huynh



The moving image has evolved and we have evolved with it. With the very beginnings of cinema, we were mere spectators absorbing a narrative through the image. And now, especially as city-dwellers, we are constantly consuming moving images, living in a world of screens. Whether it's playing candy crush on the subway or watching TV on the elliptical, we function with the moving image. And with this symbiotic relationship between flesh and machine, we are met the same question that has been chewing at our ears ever since the first desktop, are we dominated by digital images?

The Whitney's new exhibition, *Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art*, uses cinema to show the simultaneous evolution of the human and the screen. The exhibition takes up the entirety of the Whitney's expansive fifth floor and is laid

out chronologically in three parts: 1905-1930s, 1940s-1980s, 1990s- the present. The moving image is what separates cinema from other forms of art like painting or photography and is also what links cinema to contemporary media. By ambling from Edwin S. Porter's black and white film, *Coney Island at Night* (1905) to Ben Coonley's 360 degree 3-D video *Trading Futures* (2016), we see how the organic sensorial has slowly coagulated with the virtual. Ivana Basic's sculpture *Soma* features a plasticky corpse hanging on a metal bar, with the torso melting into the limbs as if the body was popped in the microwave and removed a gooey mutation. A video of the same mutated body is projected behind the sculpture; and the fuse, even the decay, of flesh augmented through technology provides a meta depiction of the cyborg. And the sense of dread and disgust at the sight of this work reveals a very human sensation to remain human, despite the cyborg stage.

Cyborg Ann Lee, a Japanese manga character, pops up randomly throughout the exhibition. French artist Pierre Huyghe paid \$428 to purchase Ann Lee's digital life from a Japanese manga company, and this cyborg girl with elf ears was given to different artists to interpret into new works. By encountering little miss Ann Lee every now and then, one can't help but start to form a narrative around her, and then she starts to develop a consciousness, even a friendship. Perhaps these multiple rendez-vous with Ann Lee are little nudges to the shoulder reminding us that we are not far from the cyborg, that perhaps we're already there.



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