

Immersion

tainment's present.

When art historians write their books on the early twenty-first century, “immersion” will appear on every page. No word better sums up our quixotic hopes for the visual, uniting the lowbrow (video-game headsets, van Gogh warehouses), the highbrow (Yayoi Kusama's infinity rooms, James Turrell's light installations), and the middlebrow (Alfonso Cuarón's Steadicam jaunts, James Cameron's 3-D extravaganzas). Immersion bombards and overpowers; it commands the viewer

to exist in monasteries.

All art makes some initial pitch for attention. In immersive art, sustaining attention isn't the means; it's the point, the work's way of justifying itself. As such, the pitch is almost always the hard sell—intense, elemental sensation, immediately delivered. Sometimes the method of immersion is scale; often, it's eye-wrecking color, or some all-out assault on the visual field. This sounds vaguely tyrannical, but immersion, as an ethos, is sweetly democratic. It treats all of us the same and requires the same thing from each of us—usually, nothing.

How immersive is “Dystopian from

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