

TABLE OF CONTENTS



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DEEP DIVE

Art and Virtual Reality



HTC Vive virtual-reality headset, 2017.

VIRTUAL REALITY IS NEW AGAIN. In the 1980s, when the term was first coined, VR epitomized the cumbrous simulacra of the era: All Max Headroom stutter and cyberpunk goggles, it was an apparent culmination of the long fantasy of living in total illusion, a history spanning phantasmagoria to the Circarama, holographic video, surround sound, dome theaters, and experience machines. Over the past decade, the technology—and the dream—has returned in full force. And if the headsets still seem clunky, the engineering for producing and viewing VR is undergoing rapid new developments, portending a near future in which fully immersive and interactive virtual experiences are as common as real ones. But as tech evangelists trumpet an imminent explosion in accessibility, artists are exploring the contours of these responsive environments—and finding darker scenarios, too. For a special set of features, *Artforum* invited thinkers and artists at the forefront of VR—DOUGLAS COUPLAND, DANIEL BIRNBAUM, JORDAN WOLFSON, RINDON JOHNSON, SARAH MEYOHAS, RACHEL ROSSIN, JON RAFMAN, AND ALYSSA LOH—to examine the technology and the questions it raises about artifice and resemblance, perception and truth, omnipresence and repression, alienation and existence.

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