Eye Tricks

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Artists
Ryan Buysens, Christina Day, Chris Dean, Mark Epstein, Francis Fox, Keith Gamache, Steve Gildea, Kathy Goodell, Ryan Higgins, Friedhard Kiekeben, Kenn Kotara, Yngvar Larsen, Jack Mason, Cris Orfescu, Robert Petrick, Jacki Storey, Joshua Tonies, Erika de Vries, and Florence Weisz

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This catalogue accompanies the exhibition “Eye Tricks” on display at the Walsh Gallery, 12 November - 15 December, 2007

FRONT COVER: Image Courtesy of Robert Petrick
Artists appear in alphabetical order
All photographs are courtesy of the artists
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The exhibition was curated by Jeanne Brasile, Director, Walsh Gallery and Jason Marquis

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Legend has it that the Greek painter Apelles was once challenged by his rival to settle who could paint the most life-like picture. The victor would be known throughout the Aegean as the greatest painter alive. Time passed and he soon received word that the aggressor had finished and was waiting.

Upon visiting his opponent’s studio, Apelles found the man standing next to a painting meticulously depicting a cornucopia overflowing with fruit. As they stood there a bird flew in through the window, and taking the fruit to be real, it dove at the picture only to crash against it and fall to the floor. “Look how I can fool nature herself!” exclaimed his rival. Apelles was silent; he nodded and turned to the door beckoning the man outside with his finger and down the road back to his home.

Entering Apelles’ studio the two encountered a sparse room populated with only a cloth-covered easel in the corner. Apelles asked the man to remove the cover and reveal the painting beneath. The opponent extended his hand to do so, but instead of grasping the fold in the fabric, his fingers slipped along wet paint. The man’s eyes grew large. It was a painting! With a smile Apelles quipped, “It is one thing to fool nature, and yet another to fool the artist.”

At the center of the exhibition “Eye Tricks” is the historical association art has with illusion. Indeed it is a popular hallmark of Western art as this legend concerning Apelles suggests. But beyond immediate associations with history, illusion is also at its core a concept informed by technology.

Linear perspective is a classic example of illusion as much as it is a technology. Visually, it denies the two-dimensionality of the picture plane and attempts to fool the viewer into believing space recedes behind whatever material the artist used as a support. Likewise, it is the practical application of knowledge:
a systematic treatment of an art or craft. The artist draws converging lines in order to suggest volume and depth. Interestingly enough science is also drawn into the definition since, in the case of perspective, success has much to do with the binary nature of our eyes. Illusion is thus an amalgamation of technology and science as much as it is an aesthetic game.

As technology advanced through the 18th and 19th centuries, so did the artist’s repertoire of mediums and illusory tools. Factory produced oil paints, when they proved stable, allowed for an intense trompe-l’oeil (to fool the eye) effect greatly admired by enlightened critics. Film, first still then moving, proved effective for capturing the likeness of our environment; aiding the replication of it in traditional mediums and experimentation with new ones. Today, reflecting on the past, illusion is a mine for contemporary artists looking to capitalize on its history with self-aware irony. And now computers revolutionize the way artists produce and how audiences receive the objects they generate. Artists engage illusion with scientific apparatuses like lenticulars, holograms, giclée, motors and microscopes to name but a few.

Yet for all our supposed advances in the field of art appreciation, there remains a nagging reaction among many that technology and science are not artful systems of thought, but in fact harmful to creative processes. There is the tendency to elude revisionist concepts and revert to traditional, linear modes of thought. Take for example the plight of digital artists who often think twice before using a Photoshop program to enhance their images. This is because some critics believe computer programs create a degree of separation between the producer and the product. The implication is that the creators of Photoshop have a credit to the final picture, and such a thought would degrade the popular image of the artist as “genius”; a habit of the modernist age we can’t seem to kick.
It would seem the underlying insecurity we are all afraid to confront is this: when does science and technology become art? That is, when does technology, as application of knowledge, cross over to an artform and avenue of expression?

There are no easy answers to these questions. Apelles himself could not grasp perspective, nor was he even remotely equipped with the processing power of modern computers. However, the danger of excluding branches of knowledge such as technology and science from informing artistic production – an objective strengthened by 250 years of Western aestheticism – is that we will continue to think of art in linear modes of thought: primarily the Canon, traditional historical movements and limited, dualistic analytical concepts.

The objective of this exhibition is to illuminate the gray area between science, technology and art; to illustrate that these categories are not exclusive, but merely descriptors of human production with many interesting and overlapping characteristics; and finally, to continue to liberalize the common conception of creative mediums and promote their value.

Jason Marquis is a graduate student pursuing a Master degree in Museum Professions at Seton Hall University. He practices conservation in New York, writes and curates independently.
WORKS
Christina P. Day. *Untitled (Stairs)*: custom built staircase and found railing in forced perspective, 2006
Chris Dean: Jump and Shout, Work it Out: lenticular, 2006
Erika de Vries *Laundry* and *Merry Widow*: archival ink jet prints ‘lenticular’ mounted to viewing plexiglass, 2006
Image courtesy of the Artist and M.Y. Art Prospects, New York
Mark Epstein, John Turns A Corner, animation still, 2007
Keith Gamache

Crazy 8's: Acid free masking on paper on canvas, 2002
Steve Gildea
Peaches: giclée print (3D computer graphic), 2003
Kathy Goodell

Luna: glass, silver leaf, beads, wood, 2007
Ryan Higgins Cube: vinyl, 2007
Kenn Kotara  To Tame The Ocean At Its Source: acrylic, fiberglass screen and hardware, 2007

Kenn Kotara  Autoportrait: acrylic, fiberglass screen and hardware, 2006
Yngvar Larsen *Ghost W 007*: digital print, electric motor, 2007
Jack Mason See Trees: nanograph, 2005
Cris Orfescu *Fireworks 8 (1/10):* nanoart, 2007
Robert Petrick Space: composite plastic, 2004
Joshua Tonies Bermuda Tesseract: archival inkjet print, 2007
Florence Weisz *Bushart Junior Afterimage Flag*: Digital print collage, 2007
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