

For The Perfect Touch

Cowboys, Indians, Wolves, Eagles, Nautical, Unique Candles and More!
www.Gifts2Perfect.com

Wire Sculpted Jewelry

Learn to Make Wire Sculpted Jewelry Start Your Own Craft Business
www.wire-sculpture.com

Eye Exam Simulator

Highly Realistic 3D Perspective Examine, Diagnose & Communicate
www.golimbs.com

NEWCITY CHICAGO

pick one



SERVICE STATIONS

chicago home
classifieds
newsletter signup

CITY GUIDE

events calendar
bars & clubs
restaurants
specials
best of chicago

EDITORIAL

food and drink
film and video
music and clubs
stage
sports
words
art
features

ART

Eye Exam What We See

Jason Foumberg

The pleasure that we derive from optical illusions is first through experience and then in knowing how they work. Unlike a magic trick, optical illusions continue to fool and to deliver wonder well beyond the revelation of their construction. Some familiar illusions include Joseph Jastrow's duck rabbit, a head that is both animals, but never both simultaneously. Although it is a static image, the duck and the rabbit alternately appear and disappear, sometimes flicking back and forth in what seems like a dozen times in one second. Another favorite is the Necker cube, a two-dimensional drawing of a three-dimensional box. The effect is of a cube that springs upward or juts to the right. Both perceptions of the cube are available to be seen. Both perceptions are correct, but never simultaneous.

The Jastrow duck rabbit, the Necker cube, the Schroeder stairs, the Rubin vase-their names announce scientific discovery like new elements or particles. Not mere parlor tricks, optical illusions are often created by psychologists and theorists to test the bounds between what we think we see and what we actually see. Artists, too, make use of the thick potential of the optical illusion.

Diana Puntar, a Brooklyn-based artist, shows new sculptures at rowlandcontemporary. "All Day I Dream About Sex" is a flat sculpture that has been folded into the wall and the floor. Its squared forms contort upward and out like pixilated ivy growing and spreading. This is Puntar's revision of the Necker cube, a deceptively simple shape that forces one's perception to pop back and forth in a multi-dimensional scheme. Although it is flat and surface-bound, the work probes how a series of 2D diagonal lines tug at our capacity and desire to visually inhabit a fictional 3D space.

The sculpture is a lattice of colored and mirrored parallelograms that playfully shape-shift while not actually moving at all. As viewers, we have a choice to see the three-dimensional cubes in one planar dimension or the other simply by willing it. Although we have no means to physically manipulate the object, we do have control over

CLICK HERE TO BROWSE NEWCITY'S GUIDE TO CHICAGO'S BARS & CLUBS.

Get on the **NEWCITY**List
Free Email Newsletter
Special Event Invites

CLICK TO BROWSE OVER 2,000 CHICAGO EVENTS!

Copyright Newcity Communications, Inc.

the way that we want to see it. Our decision to see it one way or the other delivers actual and fantastical results.

Being open to receive shifting shapes is, for Puntar, only the beginning of the power of her forms. The optical illusion is the broth in which larger and more concrete inquiries are suspended. We are prompted by the illusion to consider the metaphor of seeing double, out of which a layered reality emerges.

Puntar's sculpture makes direct references to our built environment, including architecture and furniture, the functional objects in our lives that often wear the thinnest decorative clothing. So-called "faux" materials such as mirrored and wood-patterned plastic laminate are ubiquitous in places that we linger. In effect, when these materials adorn rooms, they are usually fashioned to be ignored, created in such a way that Puntar terms the "science of inoffensive relationships."

Puntar transforms her materials into visually taut yet highly associative forms, uniting the Minimalist objective for material purity with the kitsch appeal for so-called "low" materials left untouched. Remixed and triggered to activate, the sculpture re-evaluates our relationship to familiar and neutral materials. These materials, once inserted into Puntar's optical pun, also become dual-sided; they represent a complacency of convenient design that distances and dulls rather than engages users, and once re-tended, the Formica, plywood and fake chrome, represent sexy design that craves attention.

Chicago-based painter Christopher Gartrell makes highly charged still-life studies that extend the spatial vacuums of Francis Bacon both back into indefinite black air and forward, pushing on the surface and knocking us down. Domestic furniture is compositionally aligned with the planes of their context so that a boxy armoire appears to extend from a corner while also melting into it. In addition to the tensely disproportioned rooms, the tweaked perspectives add up to an effect of being placed on a shaky ground, teetering between perceptual delight and purposeful misunderstanding. For balance, we are left to clumsily grasp onto the clunky objects that initiated the dizzy slippage. Hanging aloft, it is unclear if we are falling or flying.

Gartrell's series of paintings were created over the span of one year and highlight a trajectory that moves from a high attention to real-surface textures of viscerally decaying objects to abstractions that suggest an essence of an object and its location in space. Gartrell is trying to describe a place where the eye can read objects and abstractions simultaneously.

Perceptual trickery is the impetus for a bigger game, as it were. The decrepit and derelict objects that come under Gartrell's eye and brush, in direct contrast to Diana Puntar's fancy forms, are covered in memory, often broken apart by it—they speak about the accumulation of grime that comes with a history of being. Encountered in real terms, as functional things, or as painterly abstractions, Gartrell's scenes represent the grind of being human, of pained interaction and pleasing observation, ending up in what poet Paul Christensen phrases "the debris of ends," thus equating shipwrecks with the difficulty of getting out of bed

in the morning.

Diana Puntar shows at rowlandcontemporary, 1118 West Fulton, (312)421-6275, through June 23. Christopher Gartrell shows at Contemporary Art Workshop, 542 West Grant, (773)472-4004, through June 22.

(2007-06-12)

Also by Jason Foumberg

Eye Exam

The Peace Tower is a collection of two-foot square panels, essentially protest signs, assembled along a fancy scaffold. Each panel contains an original message by a participating artist regarding the war and the hope for conciliatory efforts. The monument to peace was first constructed in Los Angeles in 1966 as a protest to the Vietnam War. It was re-erected once in New York in 2006 in response to the current war, and now will be on view at the Chicago Cultural Center for four months

(2007-06-05)

Eye Exam

Can art survive a similar reality-flavored marketing infusion? What happens when an artist or an educator issues instructions for viewers to become active users of art and culture? Two exhibitions now on view seek to shake us out of mere observational mode and into participatory agents of culture

(2007-05-29)

Eye Exam

To be an artist is to be a professional dilettante. With what ease does the artist dip in and out of various scientific, economic and political source material and then claim expertise! Often the artist is only an expert of his or her craft; the content of the work, even if it strives to be socially responsible, falls behind the creative practice. Such is the case with two concept-driven exhibitions now on view, Dannielle Tegeder's "The Chicago Index of the Invisible: Incidents and Interconnections," which charts years' worth of missing-person cases in Illinois, and Stuart Keeler and Amanda Browder's "Urban Warp/Weft," an exhibition that considers the issue of "green" or sustainable living

(2007-05-22)

Eye Exam

"La Cabeza," a wild-eyed and multicolored death's head by French artist Niki de Saint Phalle, is far removed from the mournful aspect that such a symbol typically represents

(2007-05-15)

Eye Exam

(2007-05-08)

Eye Exam

(2007-05-01)

Eye Exam