

Visual Tactics

or how pictures emerge

Dennis Adams/ Javier Aguirre/ Pierre Bastien/ Sergio Belinchón/ Gábor Császári/ Attila Csörgő/ Sebastián Díaz Morales/ Olafur Eliasson/ Miklós Erdély/ Hans-Peter Feldmann/ Curro González/ Douglas Gordon/ Rodney Graham/ Ulrike Grossarth/ Margarete Hahner/ Haus-Rucker-Co/ William Kentridge/ Rachel Khedoori/ Dieter Kiessling/ Mischa Kuball/ Laboratorio de Luz/ Julio Le Parc/ Dóra Maurer/ Katharina Meldner/ Tim Noble & Sue Webster/ Dore O./ Giulio Paolini/ Steven Pippin/ Hermann Pitz/ Sigmar Polke/ Markus Raetz/ Pipilotti Rist/ Miguel Rothschild/ Thomas Ruff/ Francisco Ruiz de Infante/ Ed Ruscha/ Alfons Schilling/ Regina Silveira/ Robert Smithson/ Alejandro Sosa/ Jesús Rafael Soto/ Roland Stratmann/ Zoltán Szegedy-Maszák/ Eulàlia Valldosera/ Kara Walker

Appearing in the exhibition *Visual Tactics or how pictures emerge* is a history in which two different narrative perspectives are interwoven. On the one hand, some 200 items are exhibited from the legendary collection of **Werner Nekes**, who, from his position as an experimental filmmaker, began in the early 1970s to reconstruct a material history of vision up until the invention of the cinema, having recourse to apparatuses, toys, images and theoretical treatises.

On the other hand, the exhibition presents an exemplary selection of works by international contemporary artists created during the second half of the last century until now, which link up in turn with that singular visual tradition.

By means of this juxtaposition the show presents a unique perspective on the origin of the technological production of images, and the interaction of fiction and reality, vision and illusion.

Through the lens of the German collector Werner Nekes we see all kinds of objects, extending from the 16th century to the beginning of the 20th: optical illusions, anamorphoses, magic lanterns, camera obscuras, distorting mirrors, shadow theatres, thaumatropes, kaleidoscopes, stereoscopes, phenakistiscopes and many others stemming from the investigative zeal and experimental spirit of the human race.

By way of contrast, the contemporary artists selected for the exhibition incorporate these historical mechanical media in their work, with some of them utilising such up to the minute media as video, the digital camera or the computer. Their interest is not purely nostalgic but strategic, in order to call into question the purpose of the contemporary bombardment of images and to analyse the conditions of our way of seeing and perceiving. More than taking pleasure in the mere functionality of a given contrivance or in its sensational aspect, they simultaneously visualise and question the specific conditions and characteristics determining the creation of artistic images.

Robert Smithson, **Rodney Graham**, **Denis Adams** and **Sebastián Díaz Morales**, extend and deconstruct the rigid definition of an optical apparatus and invent open phenomenological machines in which demonstration and experiment form an inseparable whole. A similar attitude can be appreciated in **William Kentridge** through his anamorphic films and his stereoscopic photo-engravings, and in **Thomas Ruff**, who reactivates the principle of the stereoscope (the illusory perception of images

in 3D) while showing the trick effect to the viewer and pointing out that visual perception takes place in the brain and not in the human eye. **Katharina Meldner** goes further in her *Fields of Vision*, in which visual and sensorial planes intermingle to produce states of mind. When arranging her paired images she ruptures the stereoscopic effect, generating a common volumetric impression.

Other artists approach the subject of vision from many different perspectives. **Ulrike**

EXHIBITION



Joseph Plateau, Anortoscope, Paris, 1836

Grossarth utilises a *mise en scène* in which she provides references to different objects from the past having to do with the formation and perception of images. **Giulio Paolini** questions the schematic nature of the central perspective of the Renaissance that has conditioned perception in the Western world. Taking the magic lantern as his point of departure, **Sigmar Polke** paints big translucent pictures such that their interaction produces transparencies, deformations and superimpositions that invalidate the hierarchy of frontal vision from both sides. **Markus Raetz** recreates plays of visual perception, of the interior self, of the process of seeing and thinking as a subjective appropriation of the world.

The play of multiple vision is represented by **Margarete Hahner**, **Alfons Shilling**, **Haus-Rucker-Co** and **Julio Le Parc**, who, using different strategies or technical contrivances, manipulate the gaze and force us into a multiple and distorted perception of objects.

The dichotomy between object and cast shadow gives rise to conceptual games that create ambiguity, distortions or a confusion between the two. With his *Paper Organs* **Pierre Bastien** shows sound sculptures performing in a mechanised shadow theatre. **Dieter Kiessling** succeeds in having a slide projector project the image of its own lamp as an homage to the analogical creation of images. **Sergio Belinchón**, **Dore O.** and **Hans Peter Feldmann** film or photograph the shadows of human images whose reference point is not always visible, such that they give rise to different poetics and degrees of



Zoetrops, France, England, Germany, cc. 1860

mystery and ambiguity. **Regina Silveira** hugely enlarges the shadow seemingly projected by a tiny equestrian sculpture, yet produces a double absence: the figure lacks its true shadow and the shadow is not associated to its original subject, something the viewer is not readily aware of.

In her series *Vessels: The Cult of the Mother*, **Eulalia Valldosera** transforms the shadow of the simple plastic containers of household products into the figure of the mother, mysterious and monumental in appearance, thus creating blurred spaces in which the visitor's own shadow interferes.

Tim Noble & Sue Webster's busts in bronze, conceived as profiles that turn through 360° and are thus visibly distorted, nevertheless cast the shadow of a perfectly proportioned portrait.

Curro González gets similar results in his two-faced ceramic bust, the shadow of which emits information that is complementary to the piece on display.

Kara Walker uses the black silhouette as a means of representation in order to speak to us of racial discrimination.

The utilisation of mirrors as both object and metaphor is represented by **Douglas Gordon**, who in his work *Forty One* makes use of the traditional theme of the baroque *vanitas* with a skull perforated by 41 stars-in reference to each passing year of the artist's life-presented in a glass case in which the skull's empty eye sockets look at its reflection in the mirror. In his work *Through the Large Glass* or *Mirrored Wardrobe*, Conceived for the intimate gaze, **Mischa Kuball**



Kaleidoscopes, cc. 1850

upsets our perceptual habits, frustrating our expectations because of the unimportance of what is observed.

The expedient of the camera obscura is used by **Steven Pippin**, **Pipilotti Rist**, **Roland Stratmann**, **Rachel Khedoori**, **Hermann Pitz** and **Laboratorio de Luz** with differing degrees of complexity, and with the integration, in some cases, of different contemporary technical resources, although in all of these the fascination is apparent for a magical contrivance that reveals to us, in all simplicity, the laws of optics.

Visual illusions deriving from historical experiments and the spatiotemporal relation are associated with the artists **Miklós Erdély**, who through his photo series explores the relationship between original and copy, **Attila Csörgő**, **Dóra Maurer** and **Gábor Császári**, who approach the subject of the relativity of perception and movement, and **Miguel Rothschild**, who makes use of an installation to tell a story through 67 flipbooks.

With their documentalist attitude, **Ed Ruscha** and **Alejandro Sosa** construct panoramic urban visions by making use, sequentially, of a huge number of photo fragments in the manner of 19th-century myrioramas. In his 1998 project *Outtake*, **Denis Adams** starts out from the German film *Bambule* (shelved by the German state as being politically dangerous) and cuts a 17-second sequence into several hundred bits (frame stills) which he later shares out among passers-by in the street, an action he films in

turn with a digital camera fixed to his arm, with other temporal norms and a different rhythm.

The complicity of the viewer in some art works takes on its full meaning in **Jesús Rafael Soto's** *Vibrations*, in which, by superimposing transparent surfaces striped in black, the artist creates different visual aleatory options, depending on the viewer's movement. In his installation *Puzzle*, **Francisco Ruiz de Infante** creates a visual relationship of presence/absence that depends on the presentational play of one or more viewers. The latter must search for/activate a photoelectric device that will construct the image or obliterate the pieces that go to form the work.

In his installation *Your Welcome Reflected*, **Olafur Eliasson** creates an atmosphere of transparent circles, some real, turning on their axis, and others virtual. The two kinds are superimposed on each other, thus generating infinite combinations of colour and creating a zone of indiscernibility, the intention being to insert the viewer's subjectivity into the artwork. It is, however, in the installation by **Zoltán Szegedy-Maszák**, *Visual Communication - Homage to Jonathan Swift*, that the viewer becomes essential, since he is required to participate and to carry out a few instructions: in a frontal position he must show a geometric image to a video camera, which is in turn sending the image of the viewer to a monitor in which the latter contemplates himself. The surprised viewer inexplicably sees three-dimensional objects floating in front of the geometric sheet, like something magical, fantasmagoric.



Rodney Graham, Les dernières merveilles de la science, 1990



Hand Shadow, London, cc, 1930



Robert Smithson, Enantiomorphic chambers, 1965-1999



Tim Noble & Sue Webster, Spinning heads, 2005



Hans-Peter Feldmann, Two girls, 1999



Sergio Belinchón, Shadows, 2004

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On the occasion of this exhibition, an extensive catalogue has been published including historical, philosophical and art essays as well as a selection of fundamental texts to understand the cultural history of vision. A glossary of optical terms and some specific information about artists work complete the whole work on the vision subject.

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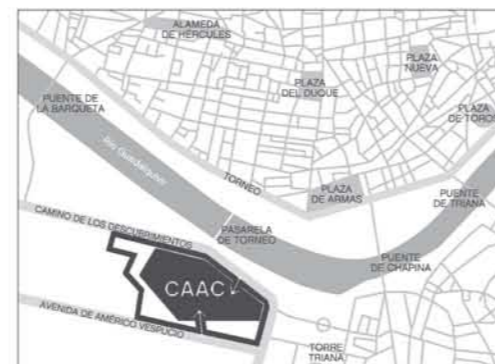
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Cover: Regina Silveira, The Saint's Paradox, 1994, installation view. Photo: Mauro Restitffe



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