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- Traffic
- ▼

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- Print
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- Letter

Now you see it in 'StereoVision'

The exhibit at the University of South Florida Contemporary Art Museum celebrates illusion and shows reality might just be a your mind.

By Lennie Bennett, Times Art Critic
Published July 22, 2007

Look twice

"StereoVision" is at the University of South Florida Contemporary Art Museum, 4202 E Fowler Ave., Tampa, through Aug. 4. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday. Free. (813) 974-2849 or cam.arts.usf.edu.

TAMPA - Seeing is believing. Or is it?

Seeing is, after all, a feat of cerebral legerdemain in which the brain converts two separate images sent from the eyes into a harmonious singularity.

But eyes and brains can be tricked - that happens every day - and art has long been a willing accomplice in the visual charade of simulated depth on a flat surface. Traditionally, the deception is a means to an end; in "StereoVision," an exhibition at the University of South Florida Contemporary Art Museum, it's the whole point.

The show opens with a group of stereoscopes and 19th and early 20th century stereographs from the collection of I Drapkin. Stereographs are cards printed with two identical photographs that, when through a stereoscope, produce the illusion of depth. They were enormously popular; evident in the variety of subjects recorded, from tourism promotions to the executive criminal in Havana.

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screwed-up men, scarred by the whippings they endured. Read the story and see a video and portrait gallery.

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The inclusion of these vintage prints in a museum of contemporary art would under circumstances be either strange or gimmicky; they are neither here. Rather, they are a portal for our entry into 21st century versions of visual perception as artistic conce

Their pairing with contemporary art elevates the stereographs above their usual place in photography displays as dated curiosities: We find that the stereoscope lives in 21st century art as broad allusion and literal replication. Peter Bahouth built six of them, mounted on eye-level stands. Lined up in a row, they resemble opera glasses deployed from a theater. Look through them and see moments captured in vivid color with deep 3-D effect: a child catching bubbles, a tree spreading its branches, a swimmer splashing.

William Kentridge, the esteemed South African video artist whose themes deal with discrimination and social unrest, titles his work *Stereoscope*. Unlike a true stereoscope, it begins with similar images that change and become progressively different rather than merging. The main character in the piece is a businessman who seems to operate in the personality of a person wanting to do the right thing but afraid to jeopardize his sta

James Tunick and Janis Garancs' *Parallel Cityscapes* is a virtual ride through an imagined future. Remember *The Matrix*? *Cityscapes* appears benign and in our control, with the viewer using a speed ball and buttons to scan a futuristic landscape. Overlaying it are continuous streams of picture cubes and text that we can change by pushing a button. They resemble YouTube videos, and clusters of cubes represent the video collection of each individual YouTuber. Not being a YouTube user, I don't fully understand it, but for all the art's beauty and cool technology, a sinister sense of Big Brother Watching permeates it.

Zilvinas Kempinas takes us on a giddy ride through the real landscape of New York City. Using four cameras and eight recorders strapped to a bicycle that document the experiential journey, the ride is projected on the walls of a gallery, and if you have inner-ear issues, you know the experience is as powerfully unbalancing as an IMAX movie. Its point, besides the sheer exhilaration of the experience, is that we feel far more of the chaos surrounding such a ride as viewers than we would if we were actually on the bike. Such is the editorial power of the brain that it filters for all the potentially overwhelming information it receives, creating a partial view that could be considered an illusion.

This all sounds heavy. "StereoVision" has at its core a lightness of heart. What's not to like about an artist Juan Cespedes, in the video *Inside 3/3* who dresses up in a full white suit that looks like a 1950s *They Came From Outer Space* costume, then squeezes himself into a cube and amuses himself and us by displaying photos, playing with a Rubik's Cube, and drawing on the glass "screen"? It's a video homage to and parody of television, shot, of course, on a TV monitor. Think about the layers of reality and illusion in *that* conce

Sometimes seeing is believing. But sometimes you can't believe your eyes.

Lennie Bennett can be reached at (727) 893-8293 or lennie@sptimes.com.

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