

The Wall Opens

“I’ve said, I think, that when I was in one world—the region behind the flowery wall of my living-room—the ordinary logical time-dominated world of everyday did not exist; that when I was in my “ordinary” life I forgot, and sometimes for days at a time, that the wall could open, has opened, would open again, and then I would simply move through into that other space.”

———Doris Lessing

In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, writer Doris Lessing introduces her readers to a woman, the narrator of the novel, who discovers an alternate world behind a wall in her living room. It is a world of masterful illusion—a blend of the known (flashes of day-to-day existence) and the unknown (dissolving forms, evolving vistas, and perceptual puzzles)—that gradually compels the narrator to venture further and further inside. It is a world not unlike that presented in *Optical Allusions*, an exhibition that includes installations and sculpture by Caroline Cox, Richard Klein, Eung Ho Park and Ted Victoria, four artists who create compelling and evocative art that references optics: the nature and properties of light and vision.

The movement of light is a fundamental component of Caroline Cox’s massive installation *‘Scuse Me While I Kiss the Sky*—a testament to her rigorously developed sculptural practice in which she creates site specific installations by arranging, layering and combining manufactured objects. The integration of these disparate objects with available light is an intuitive process more akin to musical improvisation than conventional sculptural production. *‘Scuse Me While I Kiss the Sky* includes trawling lures, monofilament strands, mesh bags, glass lenses and crystal balls that cascade from the ceiling, and convex and concave mirrored pools that sprawl on the floor. Light reflecting on or passing through the aforementioned objects, as well as scores of tiny red glass beads, and red, green and gold pendants, animates the installation. The overall sensation is of perpetual motion, like a dizzying voyage under the sea or a psychedelic explosion reaching into the space between perception and dreams—a space that profoundly evokes the infinite mutability of existence.

Lenses, of another sort, and light are also integral to the art of Richard Klein. Meticulously constructed from used eyeglasses, and soldered brass and steel, Klein’s

sculptures have a purity of purpose and elegance of form that belie their humble materials. The plastic lenses that Klein uses are primarily from reading glasses and selected for their refractive properties: the ability to channel light through the lens that results in “a thousand little flashes...all impermanent.” Klein reinforces the optical allusion through the format of a diptych, a reference to binocular vision. *Heaven*, for example, is composed of two cantilevered rectangles, constructed from reading glasses and wine glasses, reminiscent of a wine rack hovering over a bar. Whirling “brilliant fragments” of light projected through the lenses to the wall behind adds to the giddy atmosphere. The viewers (or bar patrons) seem to be cast as supplicants as they seek the paradise above their heads. Meanwhile a higher presence, the source of visible light, considers their entreaties, producing an eye *through* eye exchange that is both venal and sublime.

Eung Ho Park’s relief sculpture, *I’m Looking at You*, also references a visual exchange. Constructed of four thousand thirty-two bottle caps, installed row upon row on steel panels, Park’s sculpture presents a collective vision that is powerful and persuasive. Each bottle cap contains a meticulously painted, brilliantly colored iris—some obviously human, others from every sort of animal, real or imagined, all gazing relentlessly at the viewer. They are twenty-first century *buchi della verità* (holes of truth): denunciations for an endless supply of crimes against humanity. Critical to the reading of Park’s sculpture is the viewer’s awareness of Park’s unique rendering of each iris—an affirmation of his belief in the importance of the individual within the group. His experience as a Korean immigrant faced with issues of identity, and racial and ethnic divides enables him to speak with authority on the subject. However, Park never allows divisive politics or individual angst to outweigh the expression of his abounding faith in the resilience of the human spirit.

Individual and group dynamics also play a role in Ted Victoria’s sculpture. Created by the utilization of a low-tech system of focused light and lenses, Victoria creates poignant tableaux of loneliness within wall-mounted camera obscura projection boxes and live “performances” by a cast of hundreds of brine shrimp (sea monkeys) in installations in public spaces and freestanding structures. *The Fire Wall Pieces*, three projection boxes, are inspired by the fire burning in the artist’s wood stove. As translated into a singular image in each box, the fire conveys endless comfort, a pleasing metaphor for home and hearth, until one considers that the box’s interior construction—including focused light, lenses, and theatrical gels—is as illusory as the sentiment it purports to memorialize.

Victoria also references the concept of home in *Is Anyone Home?*, a modified greenhouse filled with projections of cavorting, live brine shrimp, enlarged to gigantic size through his brilliant orchestration of lenses and light. The greenhouse is like a scaled-up Monopoly house, a schematic representation of HOME, an image of safety and comfort. Victoria's *home*, however, is filled with *alien* creatures, swimming and procreating with abandon. One gazes through its translucent screen walls and is either seduced or repelled, for in Victoria's realm there is "a lightness, a freedom, a feeling of possibility" that can bring joy as well as danger. Does one walk through the wall or stay outside? It is this ambiguity, this balancing on the razor blade of choice, that gives Victoria's art its power.

"I stood and looked, feeding with my eyes. Yes, that was it, the space and the knowledge of alternate action."

All quotations are from *The Memoirs of a Survivor* by Doris Lessing.

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