

NATASHA JOHNS-MESSENGER

What you see is not necessarily what you experience in Johns-Messenger's poetic installations. Johns-Messenger toys with the viewer's perception, making awry the politics of spatial economies. As the artist notes, 'my installation works question our physical and psychological expectations of space by employing optical illusion devices for a paradoxical effect between real and representational space'.

Deploying mirrors and other apparatus for illusions, Johns-Messenger takes her viewers on a journey that reinvents a sense of space. Teasing out the relationship between visual perception and corporeality, Johns-Messenger subverts gallery spaces into architectural wonderlands. It is impossible not to feel the thought-provoking commentary of Johns-Messenger's installations that merge the actual and virtual. Viewers at once become specters of their own corporeality, serving to provide contemplation on the tyranny of the visual in an age of electronic co-presence. Johns-Messenger's works are the ultimate embodiment of co-presence – as viewers we migrate between the virtual and actual, being there and here.

In this transitory place of Johns-Messenger's installations, reflection meets reflexivity. Thirty years on from John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* and the deluge of poststructural inquiry that followed, Johns-Messenger extends and expands upon the discussion of the 'regime of the visual'. She makes us aware of the significance of the corporeal, highlighting the inadequacies of current technological connectivity such as the internet and web 2.0. She shows us that 'bodies do matter'. As Craig Easton's review of Johns-Messenger's work *Here* observes,

Real-time image capture occurs in body-scaled mirror and projected video-such that the use of digital technology appears to be in a symbiotic rather than oppositional relationship with the old. In fact, such is the sense of dislocation engendered in some of the folds of *Here* that there are brief moments when reflection, video, and the real, simply occupy the same field... Here the science of vision is pitted against an art of perceptual play that has the viewer continually re-addressing his/her established ways of seeing. (*Eyeline magazine* 47: 2001, p 51)

Larissa Hjorth & Kate Shaw