

University Gallery

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For this fall semester, the University Gallery has brought together three exhibitions that all generally address a particularly rich aspect of representation—the dialogue between reflection and its temporal component. *Mirror Tenses: Conflating Time and Presence* presents work that focuses on the interactive loop that can occur between a reflective surface and the spectator/scene thus highlighting an enigmatic and ever-present moment. Those artists who deal in representational ambiguities have long been attracted to the mirror as a motif because of the relationship between the virtual reality appearing in a physical mirror and the one that they create on canvas or paper. An early and striking example of painted reflection is Jan van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Wedding* (1434) in which the background mirror serves as the optical center of the painting and turns attention to the “actual” event occurring in front of it. *Las Meninas* (1656) by Diego Rodrigo Velazquez, who would have seen van Eyck's work in the Spanish royal collection, takes the visual paradox one step further. This painting contains a background mirror that reflects the “invisible” king and queen observing the scene and, since it includes a self-portrait of Velazquez, also implies the reality of a mirror just outside of the canvas's plane alongside the royal couple. The viewer, then, is looking at the painting that the artist is rendering in the painting, causing both perception and comprehension to go round and round.

Mirror Tenses features work in various media by a group of eight contemporary artists who continue to explore the mirror's ocular, spatial, and temporal dimensions. Parent-child relationships have long dominated the personal narratives of Louise Bourgeois whose work over the past two decades has become the subject of numerous retrospective exhibitions internationally. For her, mirrors have potent psychological resonance: “Reality changes with each new angle. Mirrors can be seen as a vanity, but that is not all [sic] their meaning. The act of looking into a mirror is really about having the courage it takes to look at yourself and really *face yourself*.” Bruce Nauman's motivation comes from a consistent preoccupation with the junction between people's respective realities—the way that a conversation or situation can take on various meanings depending upon a distinct perspective, yet still meet at a fleeting, ambiguous point. The photographs *Finger Touch Number 1* and *Finger Touch with Mirrors* (both 1966-1967/1970) are just two examples of many works that exemplify the image and word puzzles characteristic of Nauman's personal circularity. *Untitled (Mirror)* (2001) by John Kalymnios is an Op-art inspired piece consisting of a single mirror upon which a grid of small circular mirrors is superimposed. A simple motor, gear and chain system rotates the smaller mirrors, creating a series of fragmented reflections. Another untitled work from 2001 by Valeska Soares situates the viewer in a mirrored corner. One panel is plain while its adjacent partner is etched with an excerpt from Italo Calvino's short novel *Invisible Cities*. In order to read the story, however, one must face the plain panel because the words are rendered in mirror-writing. Much like the way that the 17th century painting of Velazquez increases self-consciousness, the viewer becomes acutely aware of his/her physical presence and virtual image while wrapped in language that attempts to explain simultaneous subjective and objective viewpoints.

The exhibition is on view from September 13 to October 24, and from November 8 to December 12 and also includes works by Joan Jonas, Sylvia Plimack Mangold, Michelangelo Pistoletto, and Seton Smith. An opening will be held on Friday, September 12, from 5 to 7 p.m. and all are welcome to attend.

Opening at the same time as *Mirror Tenses* and on view for the first half of the semester is *The Tumultuous Fifties: A View from The New York Times Photo Archives*. Organized by the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York, the exhibition features 200 vintage photographic prints from the 1950s, a decade distinguished by significant transformations in the cultural landscape. From McCarthyism to space travel, to civil rights and Bebop music, the images reveal the gradual “unmaking” of traditions and value systems that paved the way for the more overt political and social turbulence of the 1960s. The interpretation of noteworthy photographs from the *Times* archive that alter our preconceptions of this postwar period is one