

INTRODUCTION

Op Art, or Optical Art, was a short-lived movement that began in the 1950's and reached its peak in the mid-sixties. Centered on abstract patterning and the use of stark contrast between foreground and background imagery and color, artists of the Op Art movement aimed to play with perception and to excite, or confuse, the human eye.

Patterns, perception, and optical illusions, however, have been used by artists for centuries preceding the modern-day Op Art movement. Patterning can even be traced back to some of the earliest forms of art—prehistoric cave paintings. The Chauvet Cave in southern France is filled with patterns of handprints, dots, and geometric signs dating back over 32,000 years.

Looking back to the ancient Roman era and beyond, mosaic art decorated homes and buildings with repetitive geometric patterning. The earliest known mosaics are pebble-based geometric patterns from Mesopotamia, and mosaic art continued through the Roman empire, Byzantine, early Christian, and Islamic periods as well. While some geometric floor mosaics were not intended to distort perception, others were illusionistic and made with the intent of fooling the eye.

The Roman *Unwepf* floor mosaic, held in the Vatican Museum, from the early second century CE depicts a floor covered with the leftover food and debris from a large banquet—its intention is to create an illusion and trick the eye.

Similarly, although intended for decoration rather than to create an optical illusion, Hiberno-Saxon art from the seventh century consisted of line art, interlocking, and detailed patterning. Christian art was later influenced by this linear, nomadic tradition. Illuminated manuscripts, such as the Book of Kells, contain complex and abstract designs of which interlocking linear patterns and lacinates twist, weave, and intertwine to decorate and fill a space.

All seven artists in *Double Take* play with line, color, and/or geometric forms to create precise and abstract works of art; however, they are certainly not the first to do so. The commonality among the artists in this exhibition is that they each construct visually complex and dimensional works of art, that challenge viewpoints and perspective, and entice the viewer to take a closer look.

The slight color shifting in John Guthrie's paintings, Brian Sineenetz's gestural marks, Douglas Breault's

crafted photography, the surprising use of cut paper media in Isaac Joergeman's works, Michael Mittelman's smooth craftsmanship of wood, Joe Wardwell's contrasting layers, and Dana Piazza's line variation separately culminate to create illusionary images. Each artist challenges viewpoints with each work of art because there is always more beneath the surface image.

Guthrie's paintings offer an extreme geometry, which in and of itself plays with dimension. His use of color and value is what adds even more to the spatial position of the illustrated form. Sineenetz's painting presents pattern rather than geometry, where primary colors of red, yellow, and blue, and the disruption of these colors with the pinkish brush strokes across the surface, calls for further gazing around the picture plane. For every glance or every movement of the eye around the expansive painting, a new shape, form, and movement is discovered. Similarly, by layering contrasting colors to create a text overlay, Joe Wardwell's paintings may, at times, be difficult to decipher. To realize what is text and what is image takes focus, but once the viewer can read the text, the message is as strong as the overall image.

Isaac Joergeman uses both ink and cut paper to create lines and depth. One of his works is white ink on black paper; the other is cut white paper on a black background. There is an interplay of the positive and negative and the fact that his two works in *Double Take* are not precisely of the same materials cause a further need to take a closer look. Both, however, have white points throughout the picture plane which are like clusters of burning light with its beams and rays coming forward through space. Dana Piazza also uses ink on paper, and through line variation he makes two-dimensional drawings look like three-dimensional waves. He highly emphasizes the values of light and dark and how they can be manipulated to create forms which have movement.

Double Take also displays the work of Michael Mittelman who uses 3D software to create designs which are executed via laser-cut wood. The outcome is what he calls "interference pattern panels" and the one on display is a framed diptych which looks tightly constructed yet organic in its movement and shadows. Douglas Breault's photograph on vinyl has a similar effect to the point that it appears digitally manipulated, but he used all genuine materials to construct the image.

Aluminum foil constructed the multi-faceted, water-like background, and Breault painted the bottom of the plastic Target bag with blue paint. Another work from Breault, a mixed-media triptych inspired from a shattered and discolored cell phone screen, plays with light and dark and the edges of forms to construct a wild space which alternates between looking both two and three-dimensional.

These artists exemplify creativity by using their tools in either unconventional or inspired ways, using line, form, space, pattern and color to manipulate their perceptions and create visually stimulating works of art that challenge viewpoints and perspective. The artworks in *Double Take* encourage the viewer to spend time assessing each work of art, for there is always more than meets the eye.

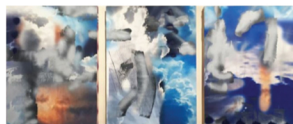
By Savannah Fields and Nicole Wrobel



DOUGLAS BREAU



► **MAYDAY**
2017
48" x 38"
Archival Digital Photography on Vinyl, 1 of 3



► **SKY SCRATCHES**
2017
Triptych, each panel 24" x 18"
Acrylic on Paper
Mounted on Wood

Douglas Breault is a contemporary artist from Rhode Island, based in the greater Boston area. Breault first discovered his love for art when he was young. He grew up inspired by artists like Robert Rauschenberg and Kelle Ferris. He even owned a massive book with information on Rauschenberg because he was so impressed by his work. Breault attended school at Bridgewater State University, in Bridgewater, MA, and completed his Bachelor's degree in Photography. He then moved on to Tufts University for graduate school, where he received his Master of Fine Arts degree in Painting and Photography.

Breault is now a full-time artist, and a Visiting Lecturer at Bridgewater State University. According to Breault, his practice is an "overlap of painting, sculpture, photography and drawing." Breault is not exactly structured, but instead free of restrictions with his creative process; he enjoys letting his ideas

flow naturally. "What would a painting look like off the wall, as a sculpture? What does it mean to paint on an object? Experimenting with different things is what makes it exciting."

While he was attending Tufts University, Breault studied not only art, but various other disciplines such as sociology, psychology and gender studies. He says that while at school, he made it a point to collect regular input from his peers and professors. He trusts that learning from one's surroundings enables one to grow and use that knowledge to their creative advantage. An important factor for Breault's creative process is "realizing not everyone is going to like and/or be interested in what you're doing." Allowing yourself to have creative freedom without seeking validation from people is the best way to achieve something great. According to Breault, it is essential for an artist to allow him

or herself to make "bad" art. Not every artist is making masterpieces all the time, and for Breault, that is OK.

During his student days, Breault's work was much more about his own identity and personal obstacles. Through the years, he has found a new importance in making observations about perception and reality through art. He now focuses on how spaces and interactions manifest into visual mediums, and is fascinated by screens, mirrors and the relationship between Photoshop and real life. Although his creations have developed in various ways, Breault still uses his original process when creating: "I don't sketch a lot. I take notes and write fragmented sentences. Books and books of notes, that don't quite make sense." He says he does his best thinking when he is driving, walking in line or even in the shower. He documents those ideas and eventually flips through his notes to generate new projects.

Breault's medium varies from project to project. He explains that making a painting is a much slower process than editing in Photoshop, but his medium is based on what makes the most sense for achieving the end goal. For example, before he decides the medium of a work of art, he studies the best way to translate his ideas because all his works function differently. He is not afraid to experiment with different objects and concepts as well as different materials, including neon and fluorescent colors.

What is most unique about Breault's work is his key concept of real life versus a false reality, along with the idea of merging fragmented pieces. This concept is reflected in *Sky Scratches*, which is featured in Stonehill's *Double Take* exhibition. *Sky Scratches* was created by starting with low resolution screen shots from Google Street View, when Breault was searching where he lived as a child and taking screenshots. "I like to embrace the limitations of these low-resolution images, allowing there to be pixels and distortions." When accidentally cracking his phone screen, Breault became inspired and began thinking about what a broken screen would look like mixed in with pixelated images and sky patterns. For this project, he layered acrylic over paint, to create the exciting illusion.

Another one of Breault's art works in Stonehill's *Double Take* exhibition is *Mayday*. It was originally made for *Futureland*, a show at the Fort Points Arts Community Gallery in Boston, MA. This was a two-person installation, as Breault and artist Mea Meadulle worked on the overall concept together. The shared concept made it possible for the different works to interact with one another and create a mood for the viewers. *Mayday* is described by Breault as "the idea of sea blindness." It serves to represent how uninformed Americans are regarding food, where it comes from, how it is moved and interchanged. "How does it get here and become

second nature to us?" The main element of *Mayday* is a Target bag. For this portion of the artwork, Breault took an actual Target plastic bag and painted cyan blue in the logo. He then filled it with water and punched holes in it. "People think of Target as an American company, but there are cultural exchange issues." The concept of *Mayday* is described by Breault as "ironic," because it is based on the exchange of international objects and goods, and how it is so common for us to find these at our local market that we simply expect them to be there.

Breault's overall goal is to create human engagement through his art. His creative process and drive are truly communicated through his artwork. Breault mentions that today's society has a strange dependence on technology, and it is important to unplug from it all sometimes. He wants to generate art that will create conversation and make viewers really think. "Even if it is just a small exhibition, people tend to engage in a very human way. It is more challenging to our brains." His endless ambition has led him to discover his passion for creating something that speaks positively to various audiences.

By Sara Freitas