

TOUCH ME WITH YOUR EYES

Stereo views of chemotherapy

Artist: Thaïs Verhasselt



ARTIST STATEMENT

Touch me with your eyes is a multimedia project based on my friend's recent cancer diagnosis. The project consists of 3D portraits and journal excerpts I collected whilst staying with Jane during chemotherapy treatments.

Originally, I was captivated with the idea that two pictures taken from a slightly different angle could converge into a single three-dimensional image. In this series, the medium expresses that different perspectives must be considered to bring out the depth of a situation. 3D imagery is a closer representation of how our vision operates - a more real recollection of the 'events' per say.

Touch me with your eyes encourages the viewers to use perceptive senses to immerse themselves in an uncomfortable situation. They are invited to observe and examine the photographs in a quasi-scientific manner to reveal medical procedures and intimacy. The title is an analogy for suppressing the tactile element; touching a person with a weak immune system must be done meticulously and with care.





















Up early at 6:30 - Laura, again, drove me up... and so it began... Check in to the rather overwhelmingly HUGE chemo unit floor. Allocated a nice 'in a corner' comfy chair laden down with bags like a camel train including a lovely, generous picnic from Laura & lots of books/games. Sending photos of myself / the unit elicited a wave of responses which I spent the whole morning to reply to... Nurses were lovely but the whole process was S-L-O-W: at least 5 sets of medication including the 'trial' immunotherapy drug. I was one of the very last patients to leave - at 6:30, picked up by Gina & Angus & swaddled in duvets & hot water bottle! Ominously, "my" chemo nurse left before me and her replacement was grumpy, unresponsive though she

D. Nurse eventually came (lovely) but Couldn't remove bottle because I was not supplied with syringes of saline to flush the port (How familiar I'm getting with medical-speak - ME!).... infuriating!

In the end, we hired up to London, that's driving, and entered the (deserted) Macmillan Cancer Centre where my saviours, the Ambulatory Care Team, detached the damned bottle & flushed the port.

In conversation, discovered that the chemo nurse on Friday should have set all the paperwork ^{and saline} in motion on Friday, but she's.... NEW to the job!!

Had to swaddle up like a mummy to avoid getting cold

PRACTICE RESEARCH

I initiated a correspondence with Colleen Woolpert, an American artist exploring the themes of perception & vision through the use of Stereographs. Interviewing the artist provided invaluable help in making decisions when framing and curating the work. Colleen Woolpert also created the Twinscope Viewer patent, which is used to see the images in 3D.

Artist Interview



Colleen Woolpert is an artist, inventor, and stereograph curator based in Kalamazoo, Michigan. She creates still and moving images as well as interactive objects and installations rooted in photography that explore the meaning of vision. Additionally, Colleen creates her own stereographs and is the inventor/maker of the TwinScope Viewer.

Colleen's work has been exhibited at the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, California Museum of Photography, Griffin Museum of Photography, and Light Work, among other venues. Her TwinScope Viewer has been acquired by numerous institutions, collectors, and artists internationally including the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).

Her project, Red Twin Blue Twin stems from her foundational experience as an identical twin and her twin sister's visual impairment which affects her depth perception.

TV: *I have recently completed research into stereographers (A stereograph is composed of two pictures taken around 7cm apart, mounted next to each other. When observing the pictures through a stereoscopic viewer, the pair of photographs converge into a single three-dimensional image). Can you tell me what sparked your interest in stereographs?*

CW: It's definitely a personal interest. I have an identical twin, so I technically grew up half of a stereo pair, as I like to say. Coincidentally, my twin sister has a visual impairment called strabismus which means that her eyes are not looking in the same direction at the same time. If your eyes aren't seeing the same image, then you're not going to have stereo vision. We discovered that when we were about 11 years-old, and it prompted me to want to understand how she sees. It was just some kind of fascination, wow, we all see things differently! I thought that we shared everything, to learn that something as basic as vision

Colleen Woolpert - an interdisciplinary artist exploring visual perception

could be so different for her sparked my interest in wanting to understand more broadly about visual perception. It goes back to about 2000, specifically when I was in an antique store and I saw a stereoscope which was totally unfamiliar to me. There were two of these images, I put the stereoscope to my eyes, and I believed it was a street scene of a small German or Austrian village. It was alive for me, I wasn't just looking at something in a book, a static image. I felt like I was thrust into that scene with these parade viewers, and I was going back in time 100 years, and it really floored me.



TV: *You mentioned that your twin sister can't perceive depth – is this what encouraged you to create your own stereoscopes and has it helped your sister and other people to regain perception of depth? Can you tell me more about how the Twinscope viewer patent came along?*

CW: In 2000, my twin sister was in a vision therapy program with an optometrist to try to get her 3D vision back. So, I thought about her holding the stereoscope and I assumed this instrument could help her in her quest for stereoscopic vision. Not knowing that stereoscopes have been widely used for vision therapy and in developing stereopsis. That day, I bought a stereoscope for myself, and then I bought one for her as well. I then got a 3D camera and started to take my own stereographs.

I think it first struck me when I would go to Chicago to visit my sister and I would always have my prototype TwinScope viewer with me, and I passed it to her once at a family gathering. We were at the restaurant, and she looked at the viewer, and she was able to see the stereograph in 3D. Her mouth opened and she said 'Wow! I can see my hand is here, and the rest of the family is behind.' I hadn't anticipated that being a result, but of course it's incredibly meaningful to me to think that I have a hand in helping her get her stereo vision back.

It took me maybe 6 to 8 years to develop the TwinScope viewer. I liked the idea of combining art and commerce, however, the patent was not a means to get rich. It came about when I saw the Mutoscope's patent invented by Dickson and Casler. I started making illustrations of the

TwinScope viewer, the drawings were firstly approved. I had a lawyer so it was a series of back and forth until the patent was successful.



TV: *Your closeness with your twin sister is absolutely imminent in your 'Red Twin, Blue Twin' series. The ghostly hollow created by the two images overlapping each other offers an interesting representation of visual perception and the subconscious. Could you tell me your approach when taking these photographs?*

CW: At the time, I was in graduate school at Syracuse University and I had been experimenting with stereo photography for about 10 years. I was living in a Victorian home; my sister was coming to visit and I just had this vision of this red parlour in the house. As an artist, I start developing things as I go. I then sat in a chair and instructed her to press the shutter of my 120-film camera to take my portrait, and then I asked her to sit in front of the camera and look in the same direction. At first, I wasn't planning to merge the images, but when I got the images back it struck me, everything was just uncannily so similar! It was like there was an imprint that I had left that she then mirrored. This led us to do a DNA test and we found out we're identical twins, something I always suspected when I was younger. I started playing with those images in a quasi-scientific study. Our faces, eyes and noses aligned so perfectly as if there was just one.

I just find for me art is a mode of inquiry around some big questions that I might have. I am more interested in the questions than the science, which tests a theory to find a definitive answer. Art can be more open-ended and leads to more possibilities.

All images & biography © Colleen Woolpert

The work will be shown in two group exhibitions in 2022



Graduate Showcase

Celebration Event - 17/06/22 from 5pm
Graduate Show - 20/06/22 - 24/06/22
Eldon Building, Winston Churchill Avenue
Portsmouth PO1 2DJ

Opening Night - 30/06/22 from 6pm
01/07/22 - 03/07/22 11am to 6pm
Exhibiting at Free Range
81 Brick Lane, London E1 6QL

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 www.middlemangradshow.co.uk

Photo by Thais Verhasselt

For more information about this project,
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