

double take by Timotheus Tomicek

Exhibition duration: May 17 - June 30, 2018

A review by Carlos Kong, Critic in Residence 2018

“What I present here is what I remember of the letter, and what I remember of the letter I present verbatim (including that awful French).”

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*

*Double Take*—to be the subject of a trick, the receiver of an illusion, to be jolted into looking again. A double take duplicates the initial gesture of perception’s folly. The kneejerk compulsion to repeat the perceptual event pushes belief up against cognition. A double take is a gestural stammer that forces the subject to perceive once more but differently, ultimately to see anew.

Timotheus Tomicek’s exhibition at *das weisse haus* takes heed of its titular phenomenon. This spatially ambitious installation engenders a series of double takes in play at the limits of the perceivable. Upon entering the darkened room, the viewer is confronted by two initial images: a white wall dividing the length of the space, and a slide projection of an egg on the gallery wall. The central wall is a mere illusion, soon giving way to its visual trick as a semi-transparent fabric scrim. The scrim oscillates between its function as an obstacle to sight and its condition of possibility, as if simultaneously looking at a wall and seeing through a window.

Glimpsed through the scrim on the gallery’s other side, an identical egg is projected adjacent to the initial one. Two brown orbs on black backdrops, the eggs hover as mirrored phantasms, one the visual double of the other—one egg or two different eggs? At the projector’s interval, the eggs disappear with the change of slide, only to reappear milliseconds later. Is the same egg repeated, or does a new egg appear—one, two, or  $n+1$  eggs?

The double takes of illusion and surprise that *Double Take* incites are contingent on the formal logic of repetition—the double, twoness, mirroring,

and reflection. Although Tomicek has utilized various multimedia elements—including photographic projection, architectural interventions, sculptural props and found objects—the installation coalesces through the symmetrical bisection of the vaulted gallery space into two halves. Each side is installed as the mirror image of the other—one or two galleries? The uncertainty, if not inability, of identifying similitude and locating difference further suspend a series of visual and conceptual oppositions that Tomicek puts into play, between the original and its reproduction, fact and fiction, perception and belief, visible and invisible worlds.

The aesthetic and spatiotemporal symmetry on both sides of the gallery—the same egg(s), the exact reflections of light on both sides of the scrim, the exact ceiling-bound ladders at the gallery's end—point to the multiple conceptions of the double that *Double Take* presents. The spatial arrangement takes inspiration from the two distinct halves of the brain, which communicate with each other to form singular thoughts and ideas. A comparable process occurs in visual perception. The two images seen by each eye are superimposed into one composite image at the optic chiasm, where the two optic nerves intersect before relaying the perceived image to the brain. Modeled from these biological patterns of synthesis, Tomicek's doubled gallery, his two takes, suggests the overcoming of binary opposites. An opaque wall is a transparent screen, as the trick of the fabric scrim suggests: oppositions dissolve into similitude. Cognition, vision, and the possibility of experience, as Tomicek's installation reiterates, are dependent on this two becoming one.

Yet, *Double Take* presents another concept of the double, which operates as a counterbalance to the potential undoing of oppositions. A physical heater sits against the gallery wall, while directly opposite in its identical position, Tomicek has adhered a photograph of the exact heater. The photographed heater is a derivation of its original, and this act of mechanical reproduction conveys the semiotic discrepancy between an object and its photograph. The heater's role in the installation can be read in relation to Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965).



Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs*, 1965.



Timotheus Tomicek, *double take*, 2018.

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Reality/Truth: lettered on a glass hologram at the back of the gallery, the words flicker back and forth, subsuming one another. Are "reality" and "truth" synonyms or opposites? On the gallery's doubled side, the same hologram stands against the gallery wall, but the words that flicker appear in French translation as "Réalité" and "Vérité." Tomicek has installed a sculptural example of *anadiplosis* (*ana*, again + *diploin*, to double), the literary technique in which two exact segments of text are presented in mirrored relation. Like Nabokov's canonical example of the device—the epigraph's repetition of "what I remember of the letter, and what I remember of the letter"—"Reality/Truth" and "Réalité/Vérité" operate as anadiplosis: they are *doubled again*. The (questionably "awful") French language invades Nabokov's textual reenactment of memory, just as this linguistic difference

marks the doubled borders of Reality/Réalité and Truth/Vérité that Tomicek continuously unsettles.

To shift from Reality/Truth to Réalité/Vérité requires an act of translation. Through Timotheus Tomicek's multifaceted use of doubles, mirrors, and reflections, *Double Take* as a whole proposes that every shift of perspective functions to translate between the sameness and difference produced in repetition. Reality and truth must be continuously translated, and the double take is the act of perception through which such a translation occurs.