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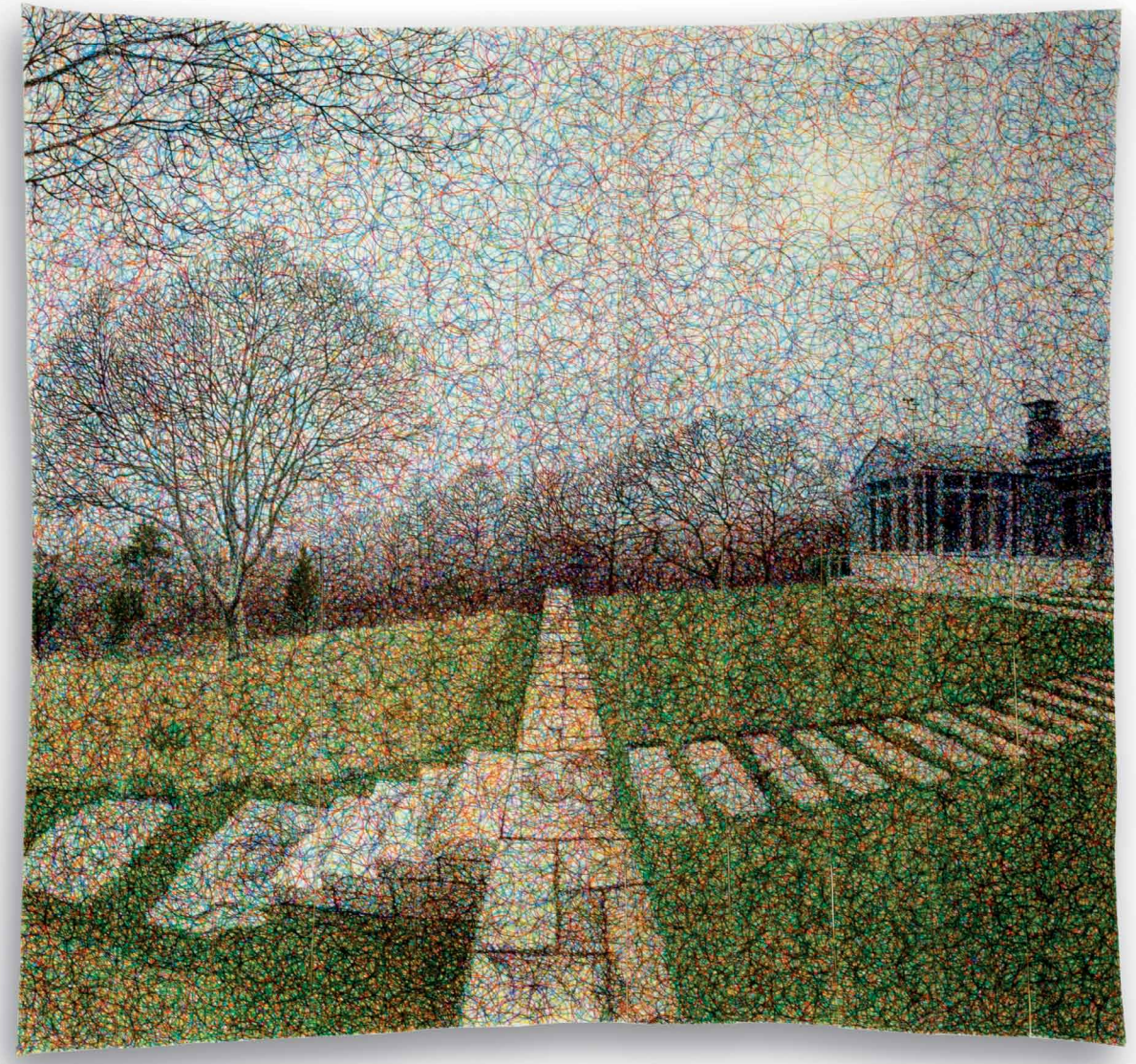

The Oakes Twins

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Curated by Lawrence Weschler

September 8 - October 29, 2011

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CUE Art Foundation is a non-profit arts organization dedicated to promoting culture by supporting the creativity of under-recognized visual artists by offering comprehensive arts education programming for artists and students, and interdisciplinary arts events for public audiences.

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It is our pleasure to open the 2011 – 2012 exhibition season with the work of The Oakes Twins generously curated by Lawrence Weschler. Ryan and Trevor Oakes have immersed themselves in the study of visual perception and their findings are displayed here in surprising and innovative ways. As we continue to strive to meet our commitment to both emerging artists and the public, we are extremely proud to be the first venue in New York City to exhibit their work. At CUE, artists like The Oakes Twins and emerging writers like Deenah Vollmer, who wrote the young art critic essay found at the back of this catalogue, are given a platform to share their unique and worthy talents with the public, thus fostering an environment for mutual enrichment and dialogue.

—CUE Art Foundation Staff

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The Oakes Twins

Art is the playground of the physical world.

Light is the medium of all visual art.

Any piece of visual material—art, nature, literature—that might spark awe in the mind will come through the gates of the eyes.

—The Oakes Twins

Since birth we've been visually and tactilely focused. As kids we gravitated toward games that involved spatial play such as juggling and unicycling. As growing artists, we spent much of our time observing aspects of the physical world that we found commanding, such as noting that a bumble bee flies in a path of coiling figure 8's. We have always liked order and systems, and we're methodical.

Early on, for subject matter in our art, we tended toward the investigation of center points. Centrally oriented clusters where things collected, or from which they dispersed, seemed to be everywhere in the physical world—from atoms to the human embryo to city centers to planetary bodies. Their abundance gives them significance, and we chose to focus much of our early art around the investigation and creation of center points.

Within the territory of center points, light in particular became a primary focus. Light bursting into a growing sphere from its source; the eye extracting an inverted spherical burst of light from the air, converging at the pupil; and space as it appears to shrink to a vanishing point on the horizon line are among the center-point phenomena present within light. Light, the eyes looking via light, and the space they ultimately take in, thus became the core of our artistic exploration.

Biography

Colorado-born visual artists and twin brothers, Ryan and Trevor Oakes, have been engaged in a conversation about the nuances of vision since they were children. They explored their mutual fascination with vision throughout grade school and during college at Cooper Union's School of Art in New York City. Since graduating in 2004, they've continued their dialogue through a body of jointly built art pieces that address human vision, light, perception, and the experience of space and depth in the particular way they have come to understand it.

The Oakes' artwork is held in the permanent collections of The Field Museum and the Spertus Museum in Chicago. Their public art projects include a large-scale outdoor sculpture that debuted in Chicago's Millennium Park in the summer of 2009, and is now installed at O'Hare International Airport. They have exhibited and lectured about their artwork across the United States and abroad, most recently working with the Palazzo Strozzi Museum in Florence, Italy, during the summer of 2011.

In the fall of 2011, the brothers will do a drawing project at the Getty Center in Los Angeles. In the winter of 2012, they will be in residence creating an installation at The Curtis R. Priem Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC) in Troy, New York. In the fall of 2012, they've been invited back to Florence, Italy, to re-envision an artwork of Brunelleschi, creator of the first perspective experiment on the books, demonstrated around 1425.

Lawrence Weschler

"The Whole Reason Perspective Happens"

Those being the words that one of the twins had scrawled beneath a quickly sketched diagram, on a little square yellow post-it note, words which in turn cracked up a fellow student friend of theirs at Cooper Union when he happened upon the note early on in the series of investigations that in turn would presently lead into the string of breakthroughs in the Twins's artistic practice—words that in turn bring a wide and winning smile to both the Twins's faces whenever they relate the story to this day. The Twins being identical, Ryan and Trevor Oakes, still in their late twenties, out of West Virginia though based in New York over most of the past decade; the breakthroughs being considerable (having caught the attention of the likes of David Hockney and Oliver Sacks and Jonathan Crary, who once, only slightly joshingly, described one of them—a method whereby the twins are able to, as it were, trace the visual world before them, as if with a camera obscura or camera lucida, though in fact without any equipment whatsoever beyond their own visual cortexes—as one of the most significant breakthroughs in the depiction of visual space since the Renaissance); and the investigations, actually, going back well beyond their time there at Cooper Union. For in much the way that some identical twins secrete uncanny private languages from early on in their lives—something these twins did not do—the Oakes boys have been engaged in a deep and probing conversation about the nature of perception that goes all the way back to their toddlerhood. Two individuals, that is, deeply seized by the core mysteries involved in what it is like to see with two eyes: engaged in a dialog about bifocality, stereoscopy, depth perception, peripheral vision, perspective, light foam (as they call it), chopstick focus (likewise), the splay of rays leaving light sources and the countersplay entering the eye's pupil, bodily awareness of visual cues, and on and on like that, ever more phenomenologically exacting and intellectually daring, for coming on three decades.

I met them a few years back at an evening devoted, as it happens, to the work of a different set of identical twins, Margaret and Christine Wertheim, whose investigations into hyperbolic space—and the crocheted coral reef project those investigations presently opened out onto (a whole other story, though one well worth pursuing on the web)—had momentarily rubbed up against some of the concerns of the Oakes boys. And as I say, I found the boys completely winning: the scale of their ambition almost jaw-dropping, but the lightness with which they carried it, the self-effacing openness of their curiosity, all of it quite fetching. I took to visiting their one room basement studio apartment about a block off Union Square—a veritable optical lab, a churning hive of experimentation (a pair of bunkbeds wedged discretely into one corner)—and to recording some of their stories in my notebook (for instance about the time, as kids, when they sat on tree stumps twenty feet apart and tried to work out what the depth

perception of a creature with eyes that far apart might be like). Presently I wrote up an essay on their perceptual adventures and contributed it to the *Virginia Quarterly Review* (Spring 2009), but obviously that piece was only able to relate things up to that point, and the churning has continued apace.

From line (the primary focus of their practice back in those days) (only two years ago) to color, all as a way of getting at the true experience of "the volumes of light that fill the world," as they say. Which made the invitation from the good people at CUE all the more irresistible: did I have any thoughts on someone I'd like to see exhibited? Did I ever!

I went over to their studio again the other day and in addition to getting my first good look at some of their most recent concave work (the watercolors of nighttime ocean horizons; the swirling colored-marker elaborations of atmospheric perspective), and a fresh infusion of more of their proliferating insights (the contention, for example, that light itself as it bounces off surfaces is always matte and never shiny, our brains only fool us into thinking it's shiny, which is one reason the watercolors finally weren't working as the closest possible approximations of what it is to see), I got to see several of Ryan's recent sumptuous blue-field rice-paper banners, and also, dangling from a thread hanging from the ceiling, one of Trevor's latest green and orange pipecleaner constructions (another of his models of the operations of light and sight). Trevor related how a girl had been over the other day and, captivated by the pipecleaner matrix, hushed to silence, eventually declared, "It's like the secret of the universe."

"Yes!" he recalled exulting. "*That's exactly what I was going for!*"

At which point, once again, both the twins cracked up, laughing.

Biography

Lawrence Weschler was for over twenty years a staff writer at *The New Yorker*, where his work shuttled between political tragedies and cultural comedies. His books of political reportage include *The Passion of Poland* (Pantheon, 1984) and *A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers* (University of Chicago Press, 1998). His "Passions and Wonders" series began with his biography of Robert Irwin, *Seeing is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees* (University of California Press, 1982, recently reissued in an expanded edition, along with a counterpunctal volume on David Hockney, *True to Life*), includes *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder* (Vintage, 1996), and will culminate with the release of his latest collection *Uncanny Valley* (Counterpoint, 2011), which will include a long essay on the Oakes Twins. His *Everything that Rises: A Book of Convergences* (McSweeney's, 2007) won the 2007 National Book Critics Circle Award for Criticism. He is currently the director of the New York Institute for Humanities at New York University, and Artistic Director Emeritus of the Chicago Humanities Festival.

The Oakes Twins

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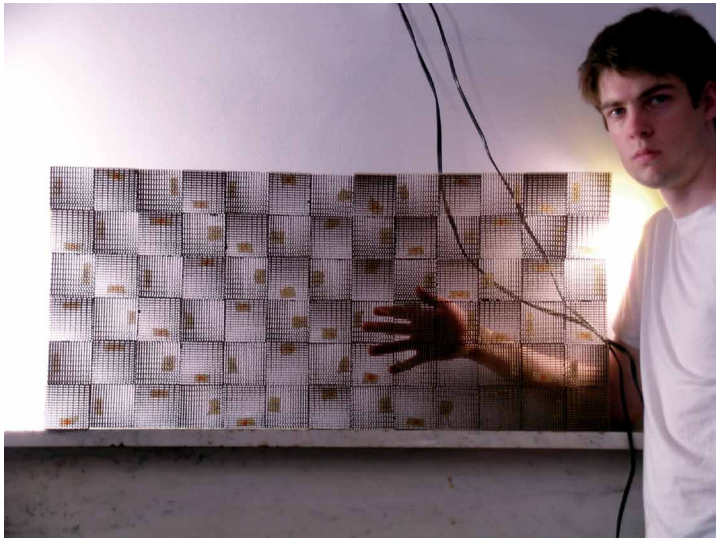
The Oakes Twins on East Village Chimneys, NYC, 2001, Photogravure, 8" x 10 3/4", Photograph Courtesy of Cathy Mooses

Here follow a chain of thoughts, a series of observations, which led to our discovery of a fresh method of depicting physical reality with exceptional accuracy.

We're identical twins. We've always been close and discuss almost everything together. We tend to pay keen attention to our visual perception, and in college began discussing observations about our eyes. For example, even though the scene one sees from the far left of one's vision to the far right seems continuous and unblocked, in fact an image of one's own nose blocks both the right and left sides of the field of view. By closing each eye in alternation, this visible portion of the nose becomes even more evident, looming large at one's periphery to either side. Small observations like these caught our attention and animated our discussions about the experience of vision.

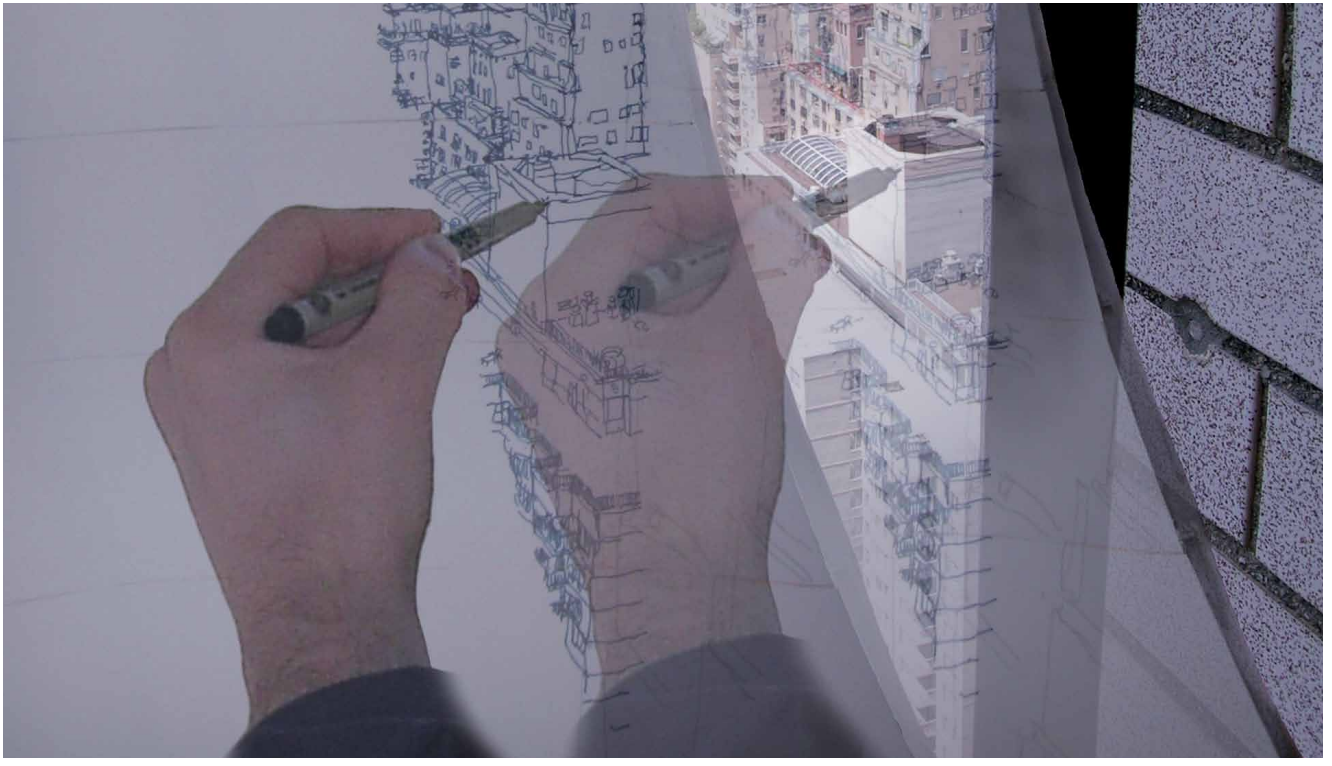
Matchstick Dome, 2002. Wooden matchsticks and glue, 9" x 11" x 9"

Simultaneously, a series of sculptural investigations led us toward a highly specific understanding of the physics of light. The series of sculptures grew out of a fascination with center-point oriented systems. Because centrally organized systems are abundant in the world around us, we sought out a common root among them as a spatial shape to explore. One sculpture was built out of wooden matchsticks. Its form emerged spontaneously when we packed many thousands of matchsticks next to each other and glued them together. Because the match head was wider than the wooden stick, the group formed into a dome shape. Interestingly, this form held the matchsticks such that each individual stick was aimed, like an arrow, directly toward a floating focus point at the center of the dome. After building this sculpture, and becoming extremely familiar with the spatial formation of matchsticks all aimed toward one focus point, we began thinking of other entities in nature that shared this shape. The gravitational force for an entire planet can be pictured as pulling everything toward the core. Oppositely, light rays leaving their source burst away in an arrayed spherical splay. Furthermore, when looking into the world, the lens of the eye takes in an inverted spherical splay of light rays, which land on the retina.



Cardboard Sculpture, 2003
Corrugated cardboard, paper shims and glue
21"x 70"x 10"
Collection of David Salomon

To acknowledge the realization that our eyes forever see the world via a spherical splay of light rays, we assembled a sculpture out of corrugated cardboard. It curved, forming a portion of a sphere, with the tubes of corrugation perpendicular to the crust. All of the corrugation aims toward a focus point at the sphere's center and, when viewed from this point, and from there alone, the entire piece seemingly dematerializes and becomes transparent, allowing one to see through it, and proving that human vision is indeed spherical.



The double-image phenomenon being used to trace *Lawrence and Anthony's View* [detail], 2006, Archival pigment ink on concave paper 21" x 20" x 10", Collection of David Salomon

Meanwhile, in our discussions about seeing our noses and other aspects of human perception, we noticed another interesting phenomenon of binocular vision. Anytime you have a foreground object near you and are looking past it to focus in the distance, the foreground object will optically split into a double image of itself (two nearly identical images sitting side by side). And, astonishingly, both images will be transparent. We can literally see the background through each image of the foreground object. In and of itself this phenomenon is interesting as it implies much about how the sight-lines from each eye work in tandem and how the images on each retina then get overlapped in the brain. But our real ah-ha moment came when we realized that we could use this double-image phenomenon to trace the world with a pen onto paper and capture it in extremely accurate proportion and perspective.

Try holding a pen before yourself, look past it to optically split it into double, and then raise that pen to the edge of this sheet of paper. With the pen at the paper's edge, focus your eyes on the distant scene just around the edge. One image of the pen will appear to float out in mid-air next to the paper, overlapping the distant scene, while the other pen image remains on the paper. Now, with the floating image of the pen, you can trace the scene next to the paper and capture a very accurate recording of it onto the paper, one that matches how the scene is optically perceived by your eyes and your brain.

Okay. Time out. Unbelievable. It's too easy—so low tech. All you have to do is split your vision and you can measure accurate perspective automatically! No plotting the horizon line, no plotting vanishing points, simply by looking with two eyes. You can imagine our excitement at the realization.

Have No Narrow Perspectives: Field Museum [detail], 2009, Archival pigment ink on concave paper, 21" x 20" x 10", Collection of The Field Museum

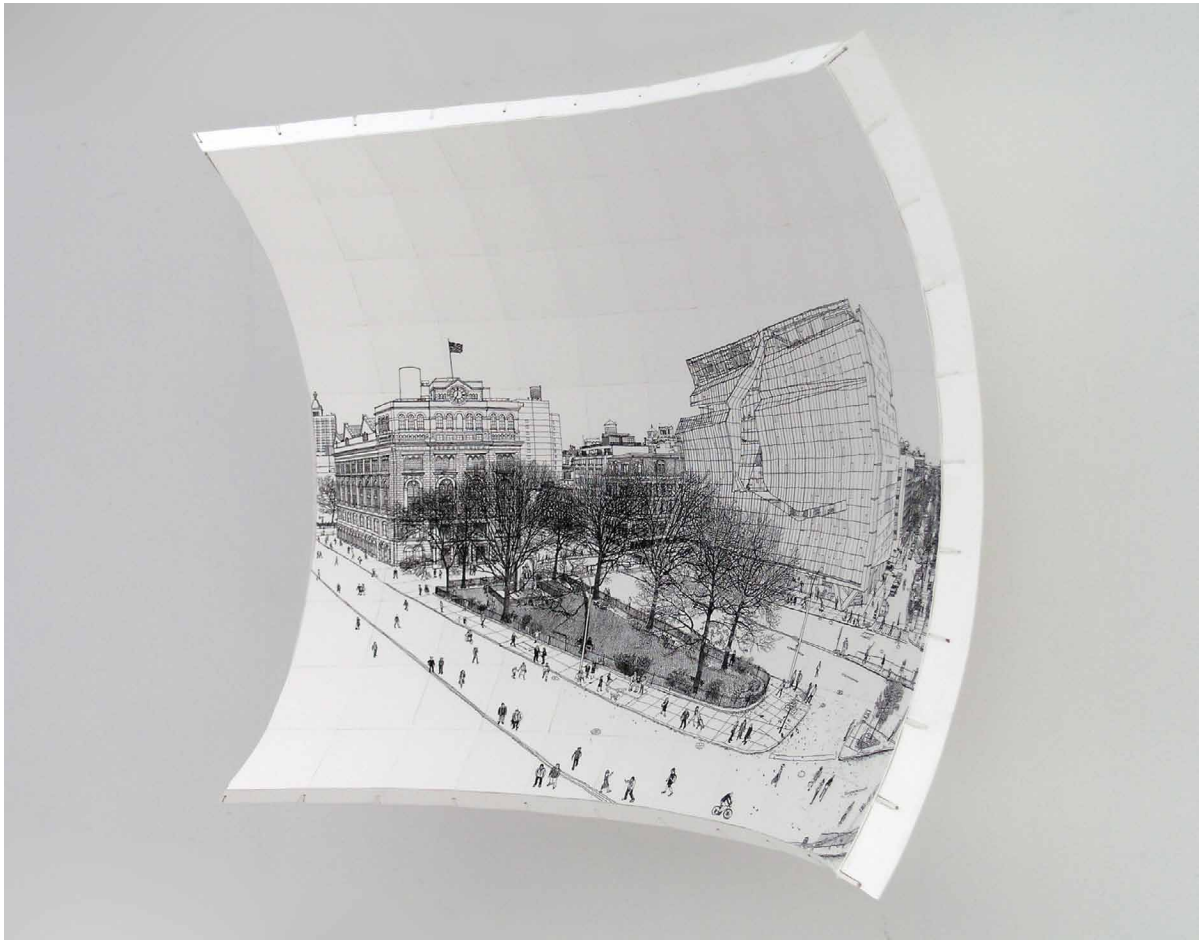
However, a few points still needed to be worked out. For one, this tracing method only worked along a margin at the paper's edge, measuring just less than the width between our eyes. Once this margin was rendered, how would we advance to reach the paper's middle? We determined we could either fold back the sheet, or slice it away, to trace in the next margin. At the same time it became clear that using traditional flat paper would be problematic. When positioning our heads to draw in front of a piece of flat paper, the distance from the eye to the center of the paper is shorter than it is to the corner of the paper, and thus objects traced in the corner would appear larger. We realized in order to have the overall scene remain uniform in scale across the drawing, we needed to combine the insights from the matchstick and cardboard sculptures and execute these drawings on a spherically concave surface. This would match the shape of one's vision, and all points on the paper surface would be equidistant from the eye. So we built a concave easel, fashioned concave paper to fit it, constructed a head-stabilizing device to hold either of our eyes still at the concave paper's center of curvature, and began perfectly splitting our vantage of the pen in two, and then tracing.

Ryan and Trevor Oakes constructing a concave easel in Nederland, Colorado in 2004

Concave easel with added rotatable plaster head-holder, 2008

Top: Concave easel deployed in Millennium Park, Chicago, IL in 2008
Bottom: *Have No Narrow Perspectives: Field Museum*, 2009, Archival pigment ink on concave paper, 21" x 20" x 10", Collection of The Field Museum

Balancing the double image (which is to say balancing the images from one's dominant and recessive eyes) to an even 50/50 intensity took practice, and penning in all the details of a given scene could take as long as 15 to 20 days. But we were excited to see the finished drawings take form and were thrilled that the concave surface gave the space in the drawings an accentuated sense of depth.



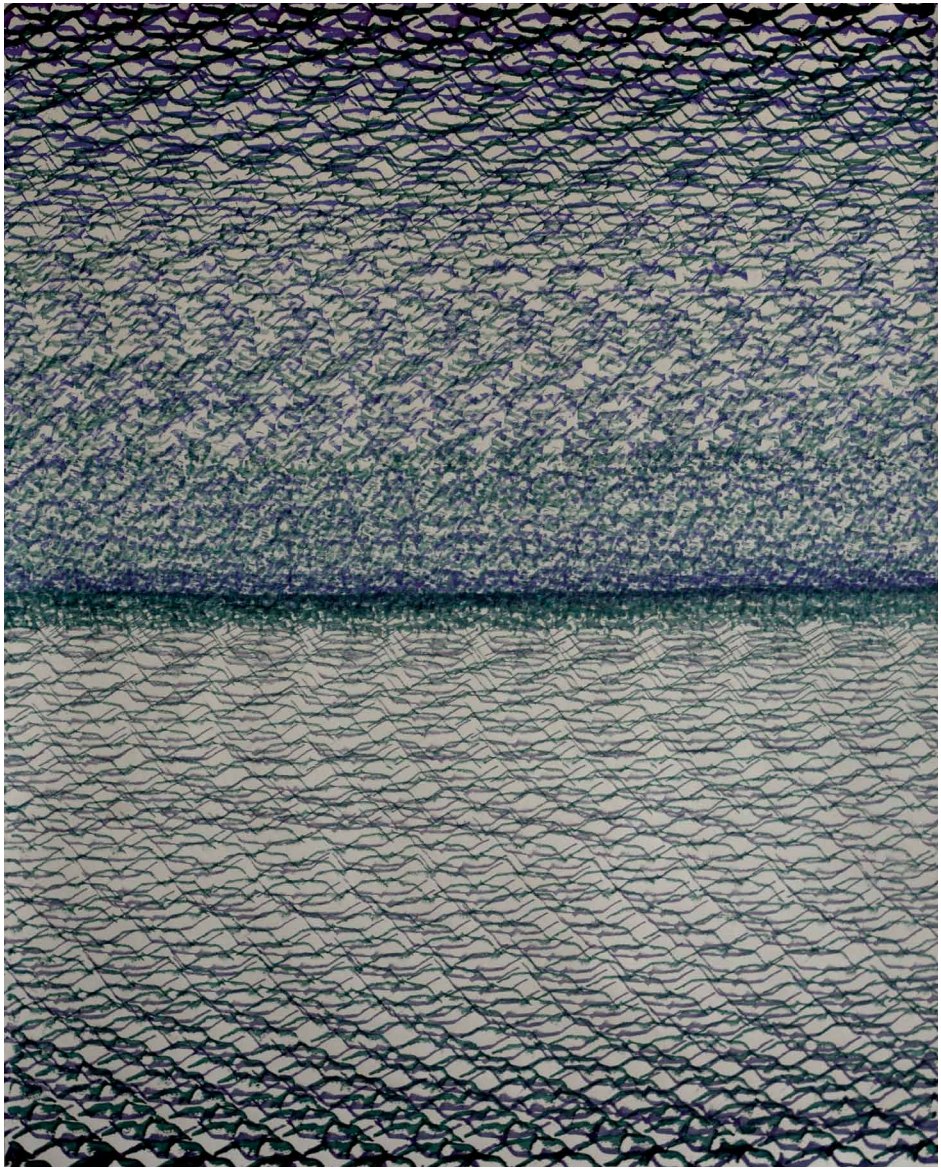
Bringing It All Back Home: The Cooper Union, 2009 – 2010, Archival pigment ink on concave paper, 21" x 20" x 10"
Collection of Lisa Ware and Ronald Drucker

Most of the early concave drawings are depicted in black and white lines. We chose a line-based translation logic as a way of describing form, separate from value or color. Every edge of an object or building is outlined. With this logic, the image on a billboard would not qualify to be rendered, only the billboard's structure. The result is a drawn space depicted entirely through information about the forms present, with the component of darker or lighter value being a function of the density of edges in a given region. In general, this gives the effect of space getting darker as it recedes, when the edges of forms cluster more closely. This logic of black outlines shows nothing about the gradation of light and shadows that illuminate a given space.

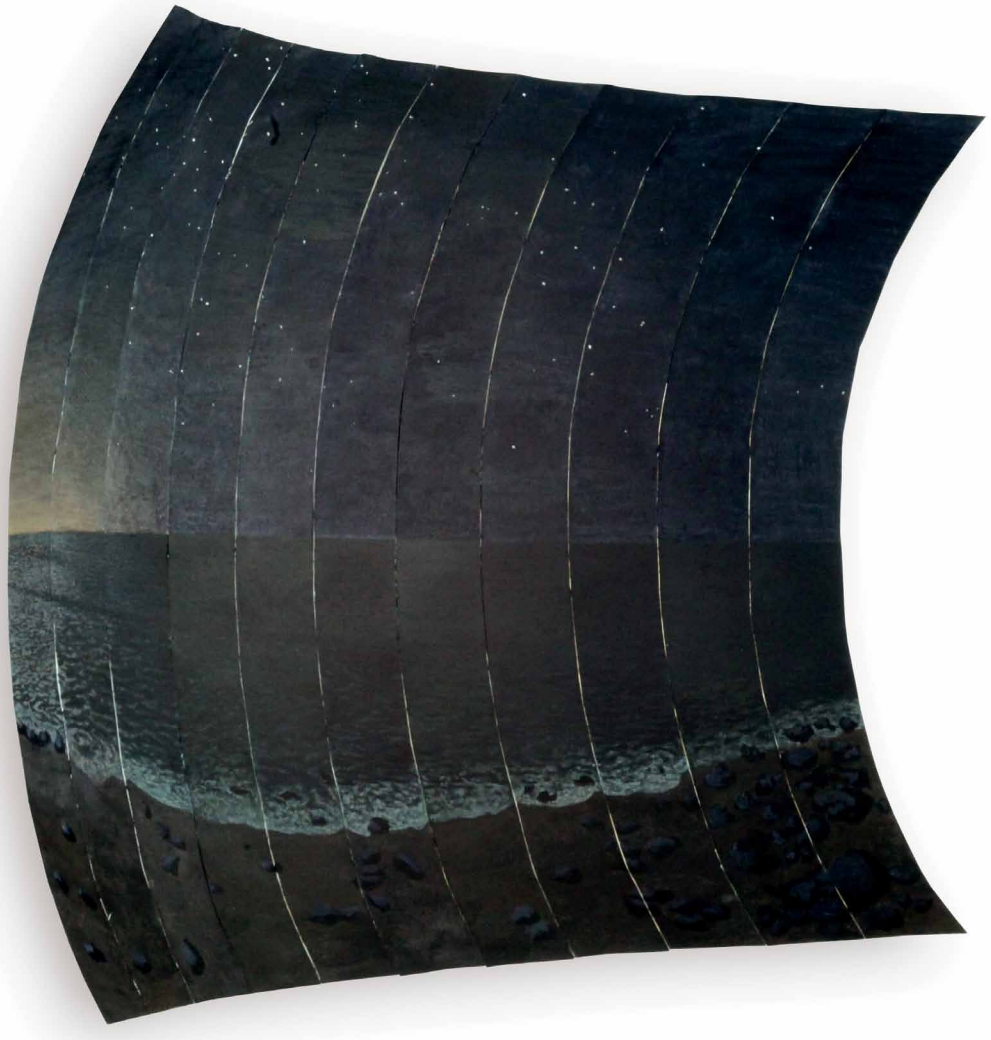
In the real world, we see light bounce around space in color. Given that our original fascinations from the matchstick and cardboard sculptures were about light itself, we began adding color to the drawings in order to speak not only about form, but also about light.

Ocean Texture 1, 2010
Ink on paper, 42 1/2" x 32"

We took the transition to color very seriously. Viewing it as a significant conceptual move into new territory, we sought to approach it with clear, deliberate steps, and chose to largely eliminate form by focusing on the ocean horizon line.

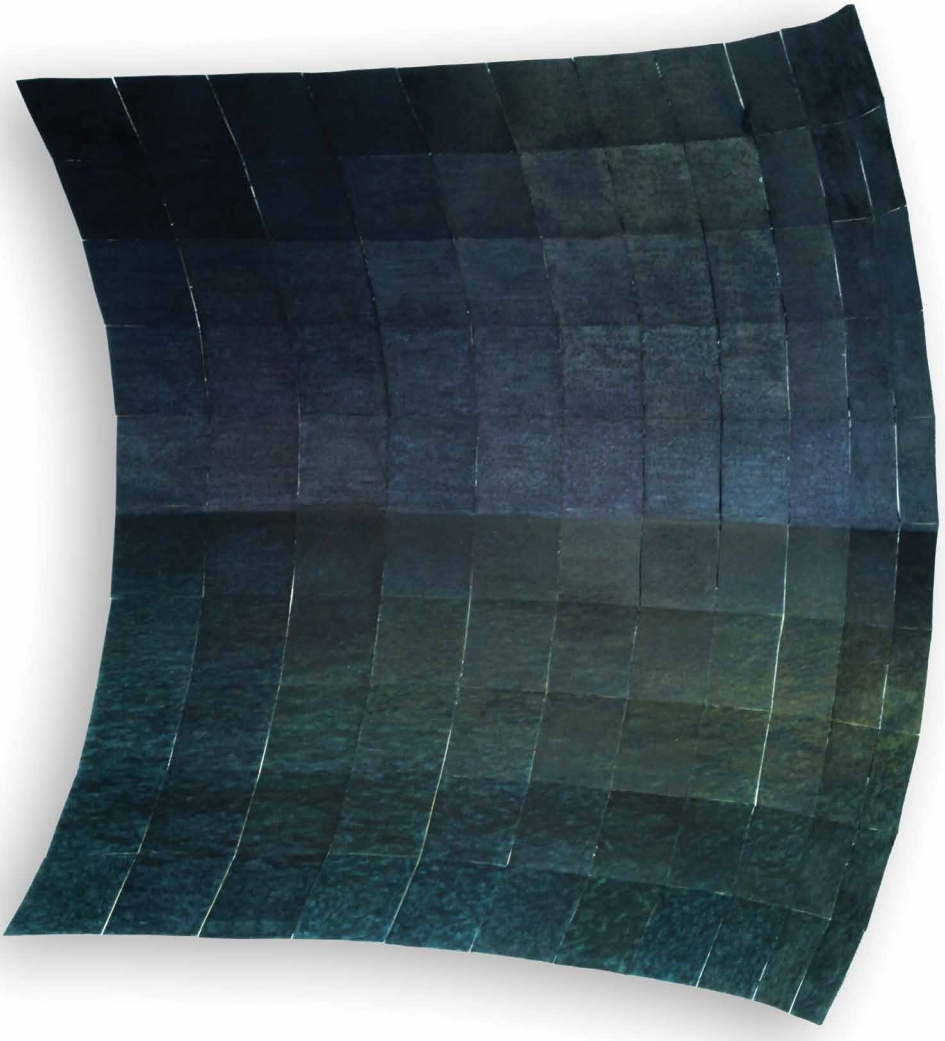


Ocean Texture 2, 2010
Ink on paper, 42 1/2" x 32"



Ocean Horizon Line 2, Pacific Coast Highway, Los Angeles, 2010, Watercolor on concave paper, 21" x 20" x 10"

Additionally, we chose to work at night when the light filling the air was subdued to low dark levels. Our hopes were to allow color alone to evoke the depth of the scene. Specifically, we hoped the purplish-blue atmospheric hue that light becomes on the far horizon line would show depth receding, even in the absence of spatial cues provided by forms diminishing in size from the foreground to the background.



Ocean Horizon Line 1, Santa Monica Pier, Los Angeles, 2010, Watercolor on concave paper, 21" x 20" x 10"

Evergreen Cemetery in Late Winter, 2011, Archival pigment ink on concave paper, 21" x 20" x 10"

Moving from darkness of night to brightness of day, we've begun experimenting with a new mark for the color work—a coiling circular mesh of lines. Several brightly colored pen lines are spun like swirling threads in successive veil-like passages over the surface of the drawing. These color layers visually meld to achieve the overall tonality for each section. To us, this method is reminiscent of how it feels to look, and of theory regarding how light interfaces with matter in the physical world. The grainy texture of this coiled mesh mimics the optical grain that humans see in dark settings, at night or when one's eyes are closed. (That grain seems to be 'in' our eyes somehow, perhaps an electrical stimulation on the retina, or in the visual cortex.)

Many people remark that the texture of this coiling pen technique has a pointillist feel. In his day, Seurat's pointillism coincided with the discovery of the atom. His paintings can be interpreted as representing populations of atoms as they were understood to be in the 19th century.

Evergreen Cemetery in Late Winter, 2011, Archival pigment ink on concave paper, 21" x 20" x 10"

Today we consider the atom to be mostly empty space defined by a proton and a neutron at the core, proportional in size to a grain of rice in a football field, with an electron cloud swirling around the football field's perimeter. Our contemporary idea of matter at the tiny quantum scale can be thought of as a buzzing mat of quantum bees, mostly empty space, yet retaining a solid presence at the scale we touch with our hands. Photons of light interact with electrons in this quantum realm and, as we understand it, stimulate, are absorbed into, and then become reemitted by each electron with which they collide.

For the two of us, the swirling porous density of the coiled pen marks in these color drawings is referential to the quantum mixture where matter and light collide. So for the foreseeable future we will be continuing to experiment along coiled lines.

Schulte Home in Early Spring Fog, 2011, Archival pigment ink on concave paper, 21" x 20" x 10", Collection of Patricia and David Schulte

The Way We See It:
The New Drawings of Ryan and Trevor Oakes

Deenah Vollmer

"It's easy to think that the world is out there, but in fact we're in the pitch darkness," said Ryan Oakes to me last June, gesturing toward our immediate surroundings. "The whole world exists right here," he said, pointing to his head.

Ryan, along with his identical twin Trevor, are collaborating artists who have been investigating binocular vision for almost their entire lives. Though their work ranges wildly from abstract paintings to pipe cleaner sculptures to astonishingly accurate figural drawings, the brothers are consciously concerned, regardless of medium, with what happens in your eyes and brain when you see.

Most recently they have been using colored markers to cover their concave canvases (concave because that's the shape of our retinas and our field of vision) with interlacing spirals. Dissatisfied with conventional methods such as crosshatching, shading, and stippling, they have developed a technique they call "threading," in which form and value are created by juxtaposing and layering coils of color in curlicues. Where colored marks intersect, areas like sky or ground are evoked. The result might be characterized as Pointillism meets Spirograph, and while we don't see coiled color approximations, and the sky is hardly filled with bright red thread, such devices, as wielded by the Oakeses, feel perceptually accurate.

Born in Boulder, Colorado, in 1982, but raised in several other places (like Blacksburg, Virginia, and Morgantown, West Virginia) before landing in New York, the twins are boyish, friendly and energetically long-winded. As each brother speaks, the other brother listens attentively, agreeing with staccato flurries of "yeah" along the way. At first, it's hard to tell them apart. Ryan has a mole on his cheek, and at times the brothers choose different hairstyles. When I met them, Trevor's hair was long and tucked behind his ears, whereas Ryan's was short and mussed. Both are extremely handsome, I should mention,

and have long eyelashes, intense gazes, and dark lines under their eyes, probably from too much seeing.

They live in a compact basement apartment near Union Square, but a patron of theirs from Los Angeles loans them use of his Soho loft as their studio. I visited them there on a number of occasions in the spring of 2011. Those meetings with Trevor and Ryan were never less than three hours, and each ended only because I had to get somewhere and was already running late. I left exhausted, but Trevor and Ryan seemed unfazed, as if they could have carried on forever, almost saddened that we didn't get to talk about everything on their minds.

Though labor is separated for efficiency's sake, all projects are jointly directed. "We discuss everything that we do," Ryan told me. "It's a collective mental pursuit, even though our hands are executing different aspects of each project." For the duo's meditative abstract ink and vinyl acrylic paintings, Ryan rolls a bamboo brush he has constructed across rice paper he has distressed while Trevor adjusts the mixture of ink for each successive pass to achieve the desired gradation. All such paintings are a single shade of blue, made darker or lighter by the number of times the brush is dipped. The paintings are somewhat a tribute to Rothko, Ryan told me, and the repetitive interactions of positive and negative shapes left by the brush remind me of M. C. Escher's metamorphosing birds and fish.

For another type of work on a special easel the brothers invented in 2004, which allows them to create drawings on a concave surface, Trevor pens the details of a given scene while Ryan choreographs the placement of figures within the scene. Why the concave surface? "After recognizing that a flat picture plane had many slight inaccuracies, we were attempting to make the depiction of space more accurate, closer to how space appears to your eye," Trevor explained.

The easel, which is very large, but can be compacted into a box when they travel, is used for their "binocular splitting" technique. More practiced in the demanding pursuit, Trevor focuses his right eye on a sliver of the scene they intend to draw while his left sees a doubled translucent image on the easel. He then traces the landscape entirely freehand. He draws the scene in vertical two-inch sections that the brothers will later adhere together. The easel, a concave grid of welded metal atop a tripod, serves the dual purpose of 1) holding the two-inch curved strips of paper in place, and 2) through an attached plaster helmet, keeping Trevor's head perfectly still, which helps him preserve a fixed vantage point. All work created on the easel is of equal size, 21 inches tall by 20 inches wide and 10 inches deep.

From 2004 to 2010, the brothers meticulously rendered the world in black ink alone. Just as the Impressionists set up their easels outdoors, so did the twins, but instead of taking minutes or hours to complete a single work, they took weeks or months. They honed their craft to produce such accomplished drawings as those depicting the Great Hall of the Field Museum in Chicago (which took

21 days to complete in 2009) and the Cooper Union's buildings on Third Avenue in Manhattan (which took nine months in 2010-11). However, as they refined their technique, the requisite length of time for completing a drawing increased. They had begun rendering every twig on every branch on every tree, obsessive-compulsively, they admitted. Because they were depicting only the physical edges of every detail in view, they were left with a drawing that just felt too white, too architectural and too sterile. Most of all, their black and white depictions didn't incorporate color or value, integral components of light—and it was light they were after from the start. "To really address the volumes of light filling the space, we needed color," Ryan said.

Giving up the pen, they would attempt to demonstrate depth with color itself, truer to how the eye sees it. "Depth comes from the atmospheric color that light becomes as it travels a distance through the air," Trevor explained. The medium they chose for this experiment was watercolor.

In 2010, they brought their easel from New York to California. However, they didn't go out West to capture Disneyland or the Golden Gate Bridge; they planned to paint the ocean—at night. Though it seems paradoxical, for their big color debut they chose the darkest, most monochromatic hours, when light is most stable, and when they can most easily render what they call "ambient light foam." This is "the light you see coming off the surface that you're looking at," Trevor explained.

The twins know a lot about light and vision. They sometimes seem more like scientists than artists: theorizing, hypothesizing, testing. Being slightly dyslexic, they're not too keen on reading, and they've had very little formal training in optical science. They figure things out by thinking aloud with each other, with the advantage of twice the brainpower. A few years ago, they speculated, "Wouldn't it be great if we had a button we could switch on that could record our conversations?" It's more complicated than a single switch, but they subsequently invested in some portable recording equipment and are now wired to do just that.

They also regularly make a point of meeting interesting thinkers. The twins are the kind of people you want to introduce to other people—Lawrence Weschler, curator of this exhibit, introduced them to Oliver Sacks and David Hockey, to name two whose work in perception is well known. And when the brothers set up their giant easel and begin drawing in their peculiar way, it's a pretty good conversation starter. They encountered an eye doctor in this way, striking up a long chat about vision, and once Ryan met a NASA engineer specializing in binocular vision who looked like John Travolta (Ryan said), and who had the job of aligning the stereo cameras for the Mars Rover.

Just before they were about to begin the first California night landscape in watercolor, Ryan and Trevor's maternal grandmother died. She lived in the Apple Valley, a two-hour drive from L.A. Their work was delayed, but when they returned to their perch by the sea, they were confronted with the

"psychological weight" they felt over their grandmother's death, Trevor said. Poised for hours each night in solitude (though together), they stared out into the formless landscape, black and grainy with ever so slight touches of yellow. Standing at the edge of the ocean, perfectly still and cold from the coastal chill and wind, their hours of nightly painting became a meditation.

While working on a second watercolor, Trevor noticed a "loosely swirling black tornado shape" in his dreams. This inspired him to wonder: What is happening in your brain behind your eyes? "There's a lot of subject matter and visual territory inside your mind," Trevor told me. The coiled shape would prove to be the basis for their new work. A tornado brought them into a new realm, like Dorothy's spiral into Oz.

Turning to color markers in 2010, they made their first drawings in threading spirals: "Evergreen Cemetery in Late Winter," based on a site in Ridgewood, Queens, and "Schulte Home in Early Spring Fog," depicting the yard of a house on Martha's Vineyard. Still grappling with their grandmother's death, they spent much time in the Queens cemetery (not where their grandmother is buried but where many other grandmothers are), recognizing that they, too, were living a window of life.

The twins were now taking a new approach to value and color. Trevor likened these two new drawings to quantum physics and the wave-like mixture of matter and energy. He also believes their colors are connected to the kinds of things you see when your eyes are shut. "If you close your eyes and look at the dance of colors you see when they're closed," said Trevor, "for me, at least, it's purples, fuchsia, orange, yellows, a little bit of green and a lot of dark purple." He added, "We tried to take those colors and mix them together to become the more toned-down grays and browns of the outside world."

In "Schulte Home in Early Spring Fog," for instance, loops of red appear in the sky, but the time of day is not sunset or close to it. The house, cropped and diminished on the right hand side of the image, is depicted during midday, but what draws the eyes in is a stone path leading to a wooded horizon line and a sun-drenched sky that is clearly blue, even with red present. Though the rendering is very sharp and detailed, another, less distinct, quality is present as well: what the twins call "foam." "When seeing an image," Ryan explained, "your eye is giving you a crisp picture of where the light erupted from, but not really telling you anything about the crazy foam the light becomes in the air."

The artwork of Ryan and Trevor Oakes tells us what our eyes do not, showing us how our brains might conjure a world from inside our own heads. Startlingly realistic yet somewhere over the rainbow, their new drawings achieve a new way of representing vision, depicting the world not just as we see it, but as we understand it.

The writer, **Deenah Vollmer**, is from Los Angeles and lives in Brooklyn, NY. She holds an MFA in non-fiction writing from Columbia University in New York City, writes listings for the *New Yorker*, and blogs for *Interview Magazine*.

The mentor, **Faye Hirsch**, is an editor and critic who has published widely on contemporary art, most frequently in *Art in America*, where she has been a senior editor since 2003. Previously, she was editor in chief at *Art on Paper* and senior editor at *Print Collector's Newsletter*, with expertise in the history of contemporary printmaking. She received her Ph.D. in the History of Art from Yale University in 1987, and has taught at the universities of Oregon (Eugene) and Arizona (Tucson), at the School of Visual Arts, the Rhode Island School of Design, and Yale. Apart from articles, reviews, and interviews in *Art in America*, she has written for *Artforum*, *Flash Art*, *Parkett*, and other magazines, and a wide variety of catalogue essays and books, most recently on the South African artist Claudette Schreuders (Prestel, 2011).

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 Lilly Wei is AICA's Coordinator for the program this season. For additional arts-related writing, please visit www.on-verge.org

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