THE EYE AS IMAGE

JAN 20 – MAY 31, 2022
Mandelbaum & Albert Family Vision Gallery
We humans are highly visual beings. Much of what we know of the world around us comes to us through our eyes.

Eyes are important because they are the organs through which visual perception begins.

Our eyes also reveal to others what we are paying attention to. We turn our eyes toward that which interests us.
We also look into the eyes of others to determine where their attention lies. The eyes of others reveal to us what they are feeling, what they may be thinking about.

Making eye contact is a significant part of communication. We humans are not the only ones who communicate through eyes. When you talk to your pet, dog or cat, your pet looks at your eyes, perhaps to determine if your voice is directed to them.
Because eyes are important in perception and in communication, images of eyes have been an important feature in art.

Prior generations have used images of eyes to symbolize a variety of concepts, such as health, awareness, good and evil, spirits and the divine.

Contemporary artists continue to use images of eyes, both alluding to historical meanings and generating their own personal significance.
This exhibit contains both reproductions of historical artworks and original works by contemporary artists.

In some, the significance of the eye may be apparent, while in others its meaning may be more obscure. Yet, the importance of the eye in human experience gives each work its own particular potency.

Images of eyes are powerful communicators and symbols, because eyes themselves are so.
Panel from the Coffin of Khnumnakht
c. 1850–1750 B.C.E.
Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The brilliantly painted exterior of the coffin of Khnumnakht, an individual unknown except for his name, displays a multiplicity of texts and decorative panels characteristic of coffin decoration in the late Middle Kingdom of Egypt.
Panel from the Coffin of Khnumnakht
c. 1850–1750 B.C.E.
Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

This panel is from the left side of the coffin box. The painting represents an architectural façade with a small doorway in the center at the bottom. This false door allowed the spirit of the deceased to move between the land of the dead and the land of the living. It is painted to resemble two wooden door leaves secured with two door bolts.
Panel from the Coffin of Khnumnakht
c. 1850–1750 B.C.E.
Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Above the door are two eyes that look forth into the land of the living. The face of the mummy, resting on its left side, would have been directly behind this panel. Each eye is in the form of the Eye of Horus, a common and powerful symbol in ancient Egyptian religion. It represents protection, health, and healing. In Egyptian mythology, Horus lost an eye in a struggle with Seth, but the eye was magically restored by Thoth. Eyes of Horus painted on a coffin allowed the deceased to see the world of the living and warded off danger.
Illustration of the Transparent Eyeball
by Christopher Pearse Cranch
c.a. 1837
Houghton Library of the Harvard College Library

In this drawing, C.P. Cranch endeavors to represent the notion of the transparent eyeball, a concept that originated in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Below the drawing is text from Emerson’s essay Nature that was published in 1836:

Standing on the bare ground, – my head bathed by the blithe air, & uplifted into infinite spaces, – all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball.

Emerson continues, “I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me.”
Illustration of the Transparent Eyeball
by Christopher Pearse Cranch
ca. 1837
Houghton Library of the Harvard College Library

Emerson's description of the “transparent eyeball” functions as a metaphor for the artist's ability to discern the essential nature of objects and as a way to stress that the transcendental is not formless. The “transparent eyeball” reflects nature's particulars, and in the process illuminates the unbroken, undisguised, revelatory facts. The transparent eyeball is about simultaneously capturing and being a part of all of nature.
The Great Seal of the United States was adopted by Congress in 1782 to be used to authenticate official documents issued by the federal government. Since 1935, both sides of the Great Seal have appeared on the reverse of the one-dollar bill.

One of the designers of the Great Seal, Charles Thomson, described the Seal’s reverse:

The pyramid signifies Strength and Duration: The Eye over it & the Motto allude to the many signal interpositions of providence in favour of the American cause. The date underneath is that of the Declaration of Independence and the words under it signify the beginning of the new American Era, which commences from that date.
Great Seal of the United States (reverse)
As depicted on the reverse of the United States one-dollar bill.

The 1782 resolution that adopted the great seal describes the reverse as “A pyramid unfinished. In the zenith an eye in a triangle, surrounded by a glory, proper.” At the base of the pyramid is the year 1776 in Roman numerals: MDCCLXXVI. The incomplete pyramid is constructed of thirteen layers, representing the original thirteen states. Where the top of the pyramid would be, the eye of providence watches over it. Above the eye is the Latin motto, “Annuit coeptis,” which translates as “has favored our undertakings.” Its position over the eye of providence signifies that Providence has approved of the founding of the United States. Below the pyramid is the Latin motto, “Novus ordo seclorum,” which is adapted from the fourth eclogue of the ancient Roman poet Virgil, and means “New order of the ages,” signifying the beginning of the new American era.
**Detail from Oculus**
Stone and Glass Mosaic
designed by Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel
fabricated by Rinaldo Piras
Chambers Street Subway Station, New York City
photograph by T. Charles Erickson

This is one pair of a group of stone and glass mosaics that compose *Oculus*, a 1998 installation in the underground labyrinth of interconnected subway stations of lower Manhattan. Over three hundred mosaic eyes, drawn from a photographic study of more than twelve hundred young New Yorkers, are set into the white tile walls of the World Trade Center/Park Place/Chamber Street Stations.
Detail from *Oculus*
Stone and Glass Mosaic
designed by Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel
fabricated by Rinaldo Piras
Chambers Street Subway Station, New York City
photograph by T. Charles Erickson

The work’s detailed renderings of the eye – the most telling, fragile and vulnerable human feature – offer a profound sense of intimacy within a public place. Together, the images create a sense of unity and flow: animating, orienting and humanizing the station. *Oculus* invites an interchange between the site and those who move through it.
Detail from *Oculus*
Stone and Glass Mosaic
designed by Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel
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Each of the 300 mosaic eyes measures about 8.5 x 12.75 inches and is created in stone and glass tiles. These mosaic eyes are inset on the white tile in the station at a height averaging between five and six feet, depending on location. They are dispersed throughout the station so as to encompass the whole.
The exhibition includes original artworks by six contemporary artists.

These artworks feature images of the eye in various contexts. In each of these works, the image of the eye plays a role in determining the mood communicated by the work, whether playful or serious.
Amy Carani

*Blackbird*

Acrylic on canvas

36 x 36 inches
Amy Carani

Me and Eye

Acrylic on canvas

12 x 12 inches
Amy Carani

Looking Up
Acrylic on canvas
24 x 24 inches
Gregory Frederic

All I See

Acrylic on canvas

18 x 24 inches
Gregory Frederic

The Eyes Habit
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 inches
John F. Walté

Angry Little Men #3 – Looks Earnest
Digital painting
16 x 10 inches
John F. Walté

Mona
Digital painting
16 x 10 inches
John F. Walté

“G-Man” – Loves His Job
Digital painting
16 x 10 inches
John F. Walté

Feral Dumb Men #6 – Surely Happy
Digital painting
16 x 10 inches
Justin D. Miller

*Double Tear Ducts*
Acrylic on panel
4 x 6 inches
Justin D. Miller

Eyes in the Sky
Acrylic on panel
14 x 17 inches
Pamela Ruschman

Watson
Oil on Linen
8 x 10 inches
Pamela Ruschman

Wise Guy
Oil on Linen
12 x 12 inches
Pamela Ruschman

Morning Sip
Oil on Linen
12 x 12 inches
Pamela Ruschman

Betty Buffalo
Oil on Linen
24 x 24 inches
Pamela Ruschman

Snowflakes for Breakfast
Oil on Linen
12 x 12 inches
Karen Nell McKean

Lady Rose
Oil on canvas
18 x 24 inches
Karen Nell McKean

*Interdimensional Woman II*

Oil on canvas
24 x 18 inches
Websites of the artists in The Eye as Image

Amy Carani – AmySquarePaints.com

Gregory Frederic – CrewlArt.com

John Walté – JohnFWalte.com

Justin D. Miller – JustinDMiller.com

Pamela Ruschman – PamelaRuschman.com

Karen Nell McKean – KarenNellMcKean.com
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