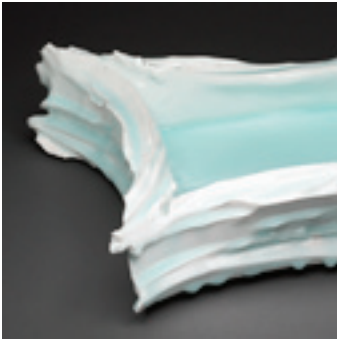


Self-Guide

I Can't Believe It's Not...

Optical illusions, tricks of the eye—there's something delightful in being fooled by what we see, especially when we discover the truth behind the misperception. Enjoy a look beyond appearances with a few works in the museum's collection that aren't at all what they seem.



GALLERY 109A

Square Bowl (2005) by Kato Tsubusa

While it is wonderfully convincing that water puddles inside this contemporary vessel and drips dangerously from the outside edges, you probably quickly concluded this was but an illusion, seeing as water, artworks, and museums generally do not mix well. Artist Kato Tsubusa, well known for his white porcelain pieces draped in a sea of blue, created the wet effect on this innovative vessel by applying a transparent blue glaze which pools in the interior and is frozen in bulging droplets on the exterior. *Square Bowl* also showcases Kato's remarkable porcelain sculpting process; the long grooves along the sides and thinly stretched corners carry the marks of the artist's fingers.



GALLERY 157

Pendant with Resurrection (second half of the 19th century), Northern European

"All that glitters is not gold," so Shakespeare rather quothably wrote in *The Merchant of Venice*. And while the glimmering metal of this enameled and jeweled pendant is in fact gold, the piece is deceptive in that it is not the authentic Renaissance creation its style and manufacturers would have one believe. Renaissance jewelry became all the rage in the early years of the 19th century, but demand quickly outstripped supply. So, like any savvy businessmen, jewelry dealers and craftsmen banded together to produce "Renaissance" fakes to appease the hungry market. The lack of depth in this pendant's figures and the colors of its enamel all point to a later manufacture, but one of the biggest clues to the piece's true date is that several other similar examples exist, including those at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Wallace Collection, London. Unlike 19th-century creations, Renaissance jewelry was not created in such great numbers.



GALLERY 264

Aztec (1937) by Donal Hord

Smooth, silver, lustrous—all these qualities add up to some sort of metal, but this sculpture by Donal Hord is actually made of terracotta, finished in a high-gloss glaze. The sculpture was fashioned as a smaller partial replica of Hord's massive work, *Aztec*, commissioned by the Works Progress Administration for San Diego State University, the *Aztec* being their mascot. Carved from a two-and-a-half-ton piece of diorite, an extraordinarily hard and crystalline stone that Hord preferred, the original was exhibited to great acclaim at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1937 and 1942. So popular was the work that Holger Cahill, the national director of the WPA, had reproductions made, the Art Institute's petite version among them. The polished finish aimed not to appear as metal but to capture the glittering appearance of the original diorite.



GALLERY 296

***Christa and Wolfi* (1964) by Gerhard Richter**

Could Gerhard Richter have just needed to adjust the focus on his camera? No, not at all, for this work is not the blurry photograph that it appears to be from across the gallery. *Christa and Wolfi* along with several other works in this gallery are among Richter's Photo Paintings, canvases whose fluidly brushed surface reproduce seemingly mundane images such as anonymous family snapshots and journalistic photographs in the 60s and later, cityscapes, seascapes, and still lifes. In this work, the blurred, liquid quality of the paint gives this enigmatic family portrait an unsteady quality, as if it were a fleeting reflection on water. Richter furthers this effect by nearly obscuring some parts of the picture, like the hand of the figure on the left, and mysteriously titling the work with the name of only one of the women and the dog (presumably Wolfi). These elements combine to suggest nostalgia for the past and time's inevitable blurring of it.



GALLERY 234

***Seated Figure or Immortal* (1724/30) by St. Cloud Porcelain Manufactory**

No, you haven't made your way out of the European decorative arts galleries to those of Asian art. It's simply that European porcelain manufacturers in the 18th century co-opted much of the Asian porcelain design that had become so popular through trade—not only the beautiful Chinese blue-and-white plates and vessels but also religious figures like this arresting sculpture. Likely depicting the Japanese Buddhist disciple Gama Sennin, the Art Institute's European version bears a striking resemblance to two known late 17th-century Japanese figures—all of them emaciated with elongated limbs and bulging, exaggerated facial features. The St. Cloud manufactory, which produced this work, would have had access to many examples of authentic Japanese and Chinese porcelains, both in the French king's château at St. Cloud and in their Paris shop.



GALLERY 213

***Trompe l'Oeil Still Life with a Flower Garland and a Curtain* (1658) by Adriaen van der Spelt and Frans van Mieris**

We couldn't possibly talk about visual deceptions and not include a trompe l'oeil painting. Literally "trick the eye" in French, trompe l'oeil has been practiced since ancient times as a means of showing off an artist's skill at reproducing realistic detail. Pliny the Elder tells of a legendary art competition in which Zeuxis produced a painting of grapes so convincing that birds pecked at them, though Parrhasius took the prize by fooling Zeuxis into trying to remove a painted drape from his work. The deliciously deceitful genre returned to popularity with 17th-century Dutch and Flemish art such as this painting by Adriaen van der Spelt and Frans van Mieris. With a shimmering curtain wire and sparkling gold-trimmed drape, the work plays Parrhasius's classic trick to great effect.

Looking for more artful duplicity?

Stop by for the noontime express talks, "Hidden Things" on January 5 and "Unexpected Things" on January 19, or try to find the disguised calendar markings within the beautiful color prints on view in *Egoyomi: Japanese Picture Calendars*, opening January 15.