

artlab

perception // review

[in]focus

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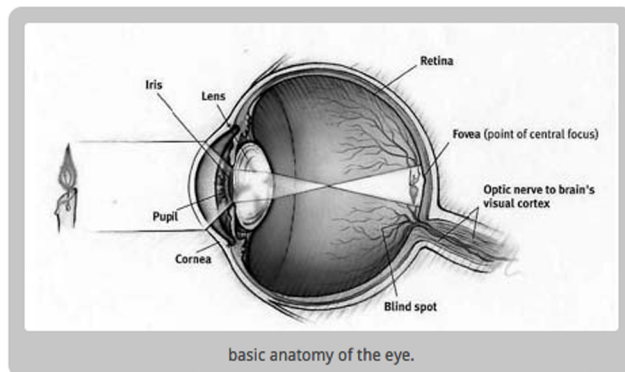
New York-based artist **Jeff Elrod** paints abstractions using basic computer software through a technique he calls “frictionless drawing.” But it was not his technology-infused artistic process that struck me when I saw his latest exhibition—*Nobody Sees Like Us*—at [MOMA PS1](#). Rather, as I walked into the small, square room that displayed his work, I was overcome with the most disorienting case of vertigo I have ever experienced.

By the end of my first half hour at PS1, I had fallen into my normal museum going routine, exercising my visual sensibilities. Having some aesthetic sense of what to stop and look for in a piece, I honed in on visual cues meant to evoke some greater feeling or meaning. Circle a sculpture // observe its lines, contours, visual textures. Pause by a photo // take in its composition, subject, tone. So, when I walked into the room that housed Elrod's four-piece exhibition, I was entirely prepared to flex those very same sensual muscles once more, only to find my eyes incapable.



jeff elrod. echo painting [b/w]. 2012. uv ink on canvas. courtesy of the artist.

As I stepped in, my entire visual field was engulfed by a series of four canvases, each adorning its own wall: *Blue Figment*, *Echo Painting (b/w)* [shown right], *Echo Painting (green)*, and *Brown Soft Machine*. Light from the monochromatic images was streaming through my **cornea** making its way through my **iris**, which was appropriately expanding // contracting to control the amount of light that passed through my **pupil**. However, once that light hit the **lens**, my eyes suddenly malfunctioned. I felt immediately unsteady, my eyes flailing to find some refreshing focal point that would actually allow my brain to make sense of what it was seeing. I became hyper aware of the tiny **ciliary muscles** attached to my eye's lens as they mechanically contracted and relaxed, adjusting the shape of my lens, trying to bring those obscured images into focus. Absorbed in a room that was designed to be out-of-focus, try as they might, my eyes could never reach even some semblance of focal resolution.



Much to my eyes' chagrin, Elrod's paintings are designed to vex our vision, intentionally arresting the eye at the focal stage. In doing so, he challenges the eye to perform its usual aesthetic duties—look at the image, focus on the image, process the image. Using digital software, he processes his own original drawings into these blurred images that "create visual fields that resist coherence." Amorphous images that are, by design, incapable of resolution: "The space, shapes, and lines from the artist's original

drawings are lost and the indeterminate blur that he produces becomes the paintings' dominant aesthetic form." In one broad, blurred stroke, Elrod deftly drew my awareness to a very specific aspect of my visual processing machinery by forcing it into a sort of system overload. A heightened awareness for a sense we so often take for granted, especially as we necessarily rely on it to take in and understand visual art.

Nobody Sees Like Us derives its appeal not as a series of four images because you never really end up seeing anything in any traditional sense. Instead, inherent in the series' artistry is the sensation of sensuous suspension. A constant feeling that i was on the cusp of something. That in just a few more moments, my eyes would pull through as they had done a million times before and reveal what was behind all that obscurity.

To experience the most satisfying sense of optical dissatisfaction, visit *Nobody Sees Like Us* at MOMA PS1, showing on the second floor until April 1, 2013.

Jeff Elrod. *Nobody Sees Like Us*.

Jan 20 – Apr 1, 2013

2nd floor, [MOMA PS1](#)