

SEANKELLY

Editor. "Masters of Illusion. Trompe l'oeil Top 10 in contemporary art." *Artland Magazine*. November 29, 2019.

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Meaning literally 'deceive the eye', trompe l'oeil is an artistic device or conceit that has recurred in art production for hundreds of years. Part demonstration of an artist's virtuosity, part entertaining delight for the viewer, trompe l'oeil is sometimes a component of a work and sometimes the central tenet of a work, used by the artist as a technical vehicle to make a wider comment. Generally speaking the resultant effect is an optical illusion, with the work being something different than that which it appears to be. Virtuoso techniques include perspective to give the impression that the depicted object exists in three dimensions and materials that stand as substitutes for something they represent. The earliest trompe l'oeil known is a painted fresco in Pompeii, depicting a bowl of fruit on a stone shelf. Art history is littered with famed and amusing examples, to the extent that a long and illustrious lineage can be traced with works that employ some kind of visual trickery. Our Top Ten list consists of some contemporary artists who have added to this canon in their own outstanding ways.

3. James White



James White, Aspect/Ratio #7, 2015, oil and varnish on aluminum panel in Perspex box frame. Image courtesy the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery

James White is a British artist who makes fastidiously detailed paintings of photographs. Painted in a crisply illuminated black and white palette, on aluminum, wood or plastic, his work has its origin in snapshot photographs taken

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of his environment both domestically and when travelling—a door that is slightly ajar, a glass of water left on a bathroom sink, a broom leaning against a wall. White's grey scale paintings explore everyday minutiae and hint at a narrative moment where something has just happened, or is soon to occur. The sources and references for the paintings are the artist's own photographs, and, stripped of their original colour, shifts focus onto subject and masterful trompe l'oeil technique. Reminiscent of crime scene photography, or with the air of stills from film noir, White renders moments of silence, doubt and repose—subjects and feelings that have been the subject of art for centuries, whilst profoundly updating its implications.