

Sharjah

“I Look to You and I See Nothing”

SHARJAH ART FOUNDATION

Sharjah Arts Area

November 16–February 14

Though simply worded, the title of this thought-provoking exhibition succinctly maps its complex conceptual, phenomenological, and philosophical terrain. By asserting a distinction between looking and seeing, it introduces distance between the sensory act and perceptions it evokes, allowing for the possibility of seeing without looking and inner vision gained without or despite external visual stimuli. The seventeen works by sixteen artists included here activate this universal but subjective faculty in distinct ways.

Gino de Dominicis's *Cubo Invisible (Invisible Cube)*, 1967, and Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Metrocubo d'infinito (A Cubic Metre of Infinity)*, 1966, present simple conceptual gambits. The first, a square in tape on the floor, asks us to visualize the completed cube, while the second, a cube of inward-facing mirrors, creates a hermetic space of infinite self-reflection accessible only through imagination. Others are less subtle: Kurt Hentschläger's *Zee*, 2008, immerses you in a suffocating ether of artificial fog and flickering light, color and sound, obliterating your ability to perceive your body's limits through sheer sensory overload. Unanchored by reality, sight retreats into consciousness.

While much of the work is phenomenological, some explicitly evokes the body. In Teresa Margolles's *Aire (Air)*, 2003, humidifiers saturate the atmosphere of an empty gallery with water used to wash corpses. The quiet whirl of the humidifiers and the clear plastic room dividers suggest a morgue or a meat locker and, despite their indubitable material absence, it is impossible not to see the dead and feel your own mortality. And in Sophie Calle's *Les Aveugles (The Blinds)*, 1986, and *La Dernière image (The Last Image)*, 2010—both projects emerging from conversations with the blind—photographs, images of beauty in the former and the final image before the loss of sight in the latter, function as empathetic pivots, asking us to sharpen our other senses and enter their bodies and worlds for a few unsatisfactory moments. Giuseppe Penone's *Rovesciare i propri occhi (To Reverse One's Eyes)*, 1970, distills this implied ethics of seeing into a single image: an incredibly unsettling photograph of the artist wearing mirrored contacts, blinding himself but generously gifting us what lies in his eyes.



Giuseppe Penone, *Rovesciare i propri occhi (To Reverse One's Eyes)*, 1970, chromogenic print, dimensions variable.

— Murtaza Vali