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Silver Eye takes us through *The Looking Glass*.

By Savannah Guz

The overall effect of Silver Eye's current exhibition, *The Looking Glass*, is genuinely striking. Dozens of works, each with its own distinct aesthetic voice, hang salon-style in the two-room gallery. Depending on the viewer's vantage point, the protective glasses of the framed photos gleam with opaque geometric shapes and ghostly reflections. This illusion incidentally echoes the exhibition's theme: While we gaze at the artists' diverse interpretation of "looking glasses," our own images are reflected back, integrating the real and artistically fabricated worlds with an *Alice in Wonderland*-like enchantment.

While the show's title may conjure inevitable Lewis Carroll associations, the exhibition is another manifestation of the citywide Pittsburgh Celebrates Glass! initiative. The 109 images by 100 artists from 15 different states were selected from an open-submission call to Silver Eye members. The organizers -- Silver Eye staffers Amanda Bloomfield, Kaoru Tohara and Magali Duzant -- encouraged liberal thematic interpretation.

The most intensely colorful rendering of the theme appears just inside the gallery doors. Legendary Pittsburgh photographer Clyde Hare's Fujichrome Super Gloss print "Light Through Chihuly Glass" (2006) looks, at first glance, like explosive sparks captured at the moment of detonation. Bright yellow embers spray outward, caught in mid-trajectory. Closer inspection reveals the subject to be the bulging foot of a blown-glass Dale Chihuly vase and its projection onto the white pedestal beneath it.

Other artists interpret the theme more literally. Brookline, Mass., native Rania Matar's silver-gelatin print "Broken Mirror, Beirut," (2005), seems a contemplative candid of a teenage Muslim girl at her vanity. The girl adjusts her head scarf in a mirror so fragmented that its corners are no longer square. With its gritty documentary realism, "Broken Mirror, Beirut" suggests a visual metaphor for the region's social, religious and political fragmentation, a portentous signifier of the milieu in which the next generation is finding its splintered identity.

Pittsburgh-based photographer Robert Raczka also features a young woman in his 2005 chromogenic print "Untitled (8-31)," from his series *American Brain*. However, Raczka's subject faces us, standing against a highly reflective architectural façade that returns distorted images of its urban environment. The girl appears diminished by the confusing sensory onslaught that surrounds her. This, like Matar's work, is a perfect portrait of the culture in which the girl lives: information-rich, slightly menacing, frequently overwhelming.

The haunting silver gelatin print "Glasses by the Window" (2006) from a pinhole photograph by East Pittsburgh resident John Fobes, shows a pair of tinted spectacles, strongly resembling the blue-tinted lenses prescribed to 19th-century patients suffering from light intolerance. Intended as a tribute to the photographer's deceased great aunt, the image places the spectacles on a patterned linen cloth before a stunningly illuminated window, over which a crocheted curtain rustles.

"505.30 from Forty Eight States," a 2007 archival-film-based inkjet print by Candace Plummer Gaudiani, of Menlo Park, Calif., was taken with a Leica camera from the window of a train traveling at 100 mph through the continental U.S. It bears the grainy ambiguity associated with the transcription of memories and dreams and crystallizes an unidentified landscape, dramatically black-boxed by the round-edged train window. Gaudiani's study of printmaking is evident in this photograph containing such graphic tonal contrasts.

Filled with individual voices and divergent thematic interpretations, *The Looking Glass* reminds visitors that photography is ultimately a self-reflexive mode of expression. While it records environments, however contrived, it exposes personal and social preoccupations -- perhaps revealing just as much about the artist as it reveals about its subject. *The Looking Glass* is a mosaic of private microcosms.

The Looking Glass continues through Sept. 15. Silver Eye Center for Photography, 1015 E. Carson St., South Side. 412-431-1810



See sharp: Rania Matar's "Broken Mirror, Beirut."