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'Descartes' Daughter at the Swiss Institute
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'Descartes' Daughter' at the Swiss Institute

Named for the "animatronic effigy" that the father of mind-body dualism supposedly built after the death of his young daughter, [this group show](#), curated by Piper Marshall, doesn't argue with the famous dichotomy so much as indulge in it, taking its inadequacies for granted and then squeezing out the fun it still has to offer.

The shiny, sealed-off surfaces of Ulrike Müller's five small enamel-on-steel *Mirrors* reflect the viewer's face as if by accident, ostensibly more intent on communicating their own designs. But even those designs—an inscribed white circle orbited by a small gray moon; a bone-yellow form like a minuscule Blackletter "i," with the viewer's face for a dot—draw most of their meaning from the encounter. Only one, a heraldic-couture composite of triangles and pinked borders, offers a diffident, solitary cogito.

The transition into the externalized reconstruction of the viewer's own mind that fills the main gallery is signaled by Lucas Knipscher's *What Nice Feet I Have #1*, a flat circle covered in newspaper that hangs from a narrow square pole just inches above its own shadow on the slick concrete floor. An apparently solemn descent of Platonic geometry, this pendulum makes a good-natured jab at Descartes's failure to explain the mind's control of the body by wavering slightly as you approach; then the projecting triangular nose on its far side points you up to its gray porcelain feet walking on the ceiling, sweetly but firmly insisting that it's not the spirit but the body that was ever in doubt.

Sergei Tcherepnin's *Stereo Ear Tone Mirrors*, two round security mirrors in the room's corners, plays the self-creating feedback of the ghost in the machine as an electronic score. John Chamberlain's untitled, gap-toothed foam sectional covered in a silver parachute gets at the gruesomeness of the genuinely mindless body. Rochelle Goldberg's *the space between two mirrors*, a black steel frame enclosing a horizontal wooden sculpture, is a ball-and-socket curtsy to phenomenology constructed with the conceptually robust looseness of an AK-47. And Pamela Rosenkranz's *Because They Try to Bore Holes (Gaining Tension)*, a blank sheet of Ilford photo paper mounted in a shiny white frame under glass, gets at the streaks and stains of consciousness with no object.



Lucas Knipscher, 'What Nice Feet I Have #2' (2013), front, and Miriam Cahn, 'L.I.S. strat. orte bergsee' (1986), behind. (Courtesy the artists and Swiss Institute)

In Melanie Gilligan's brilliant video *Self Capital, Episodes 1-3*, the global economy, played with sexy gusto by Penelope McGhie, submits herself to a course of hypnotic self analysis. Charline von Heyl's *My Little Doppelgänger Poltergeist Soul* is an oil painting of a rib-bone marimba. And Mr. Knipscher's *What Nice Feet I Have #2* drops right through the floor into the downstairs gallery, where its cartoonishly monocled pendulum hangs between Ms. Goldberg's *Tan of Cuna*, an inset, chromed-tin portrait of the human being as minimal but unbreakable, and Miriam Cahn's *L.I.S. strat. orte bergsee*, a massive black chalk drawing of an ocean. "If decontextualizing causes you to miss the point," Mr. Knipscher's calmly upside-down pendulum seems to say, "It isn't my fault." (*Through Nov. 3*)