

Mary Temple

BORN 1957 IN PHOENIX, ARIZONA; LIVES AND WORKS IN BROOKLYN

Mary Temple says that the primary subject of her art is doubt. Whether she works in drawing, site-specific installation, sculpture, or painting, “themes of trust, transparency, and truthfulness” are her constant concern.¹ Her *Light Installations*, a series begun in 2002, get at these themes through trompe l’oeil paintings of shadows and sunlight that seem to merge with the architecture on which they are painted. While completely believable as sensory data, the paintings depict situations that are architectural or meteorological impossibilities. *Forest for the Sea* (2006), for example, was a twenty-five-by-sixty-six-foot image of soft shadows seemingly cast by large leafy trees as sunlight streamed through the windows of Brooklyn’s Smack Mellon gallery. But the shadows did not change with the movement of the sun, the leaves did not move in the breeze, and visitors’ bodies cast no shadows as they traversed the space. “As viewers began to solve the visual puzzle [of this piece] and understand the reality of the environment,” Temple has written, “they may have realized they were taken in by a simple illusion—that their senses were surprisingly untrustworthy.”² But Temple is not out to trick viewers; rather, she wants to give them the chance to “enjoy not knowing” what precisely they are looking at.³

More recently, Temple has created light installation “fragments” on small sections of wall and floor. *IT MUST BE TRUE* (fragment) (2011) comprises a panel of white drywall that leans against the wall and abuts several interlocking hardwood planks assembled on the floor. A painted shadow of the hopeful phrase “It Must Be True” rakes across the drywall and onto the floor panels. The piece has several layers of perceptual truth and fiction. It is made of actual building materials, so one could imagine that it is a fragment taken from another, disassembled room. The piece casts actual shadows in the space in which it is installed but also seems to have brought with it a patch of sunlight and shadow. To those familiar with Temple’s work, *IT MUST BE TRUE* might seem to be a section of one of her larger trompe l’oeil paintings. Its title allows for all these possibilities to be true while simultaneously suggesting that seeing should not necessarily be believing.

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¹ Mary Temple, statement on the artist’s website, <http://marytemple.com/texts>

² Mary Temple, statement about *Forest for the Sea* on the artist’s website, <http://marytemple.com/detail/light-installations/148/forest-for-the-sea>.

³ Mary Temple, statement about light installations on the artist’s website, <http://s139022.gridserver.com/media/files/light-installations-2009.pdf>



IT MUST BE TRUE (fragment), 2011; acrylic paint on drywall, wood stain and urethane on hardwood, acrylic gel; 39 x 46 x 45 inches (99.1 x 116.8 x 114.3 cm); courtesy of the artist and Mixed Greens, New York