



## BMO PROJECT ROOM

**Adad Hannah**

*All Is Vanity (Mirrorless Version)*

Created in 2008

High-definition digital video, 11 min 46 sec

In *All Is Vanity (Mirrorless Version)* Adad Hannah stages a historical drawing as a video. The artist asks a pair of identical twins to perform a *tableau vivant* in order to render a mirror where there is none, creating an illusion within an illusion.

The source of inspiration for Hannah's installation is an image made in 1892 by an eighteen-year-old illustrator named Charles Allan Gilbert (1873-1929). Gilbert's drawing, entitled *All Is Vanity*, remains one of the world's most famous optical illusions. It depicts a young woman surrounded by perfume and makeup, gazing at her reflection in the oval mirror of a wooden vanity. However, the drawing can also be read as a large human skull, the objects carefully arranged so that the vanity's mirror forms the dome of the skull, the woman's head and reflection its eye sockets, her toiletry bottles doubling as the skull's jagged teeth, and the table cloth delineating the jaw line. This clever image was sold to Life Publishing Co. in 1902, and the print quickly became a bestseller.

In the BMO Project Room, Hannah has reconstructed Gilbert's nineteenth-century optical illusion with his own rendering of *All Is Vanity* in high-definition video using a custom-built set. In this version there is no mirror – the oval of the vanity is an empty wooden frame – and Hannah casts twins to perform the woman and her reflection, a way of creating the appearance of a mirror where there is only an empty opening. The vertical video on the plasma screen is an 11-minute 46-second continuous shot: Hannah posed the twins across from each other and asked them to remain as still as possible for the duration of the piece. The blinking and breathing of the twins becomes evidence of time passing, which breaks the static nature of Gilbert's original drawing and reminds viewers of their own existence within the flux of space and time. The *mise-en-scène* is recreated within the exhibition space, with all elements of the set – furniture, carpet, curtains, lights, video camera – preserved and displayed in the room.

- Dawn Cain, Curator, BMO Corporate Art Collection



Adad Hannah was born in New York in 1971. He lived in Israel and England before immigrating to Canada with his family in the early 1980s. He has an undergraduate degree from the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver, and a Masters degree from Concordia University in Montreal, where he currently lives. Primarily using video and photography, Hannah has worked on his *Stills* (real-time video-recorded *tableaux vivants*) since 2001, producing and exhibiting them in museums and galleries around the world. Adad

Hannah is represented by Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain, in Montreal.

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