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[In Brief: Zee](#)

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Austrian artist Kurt Hentschlagler creates environments that use light, sound, and performance to immerse viewers in an aesthetic experience. I saw his piece *ZEE* today and I'm still not sure to respond to such an overwhelming work. I was a little nervous as I sat in the waiting room, signing medical waivers and eavesdropping on the rather fratboy-ish viewers who had just come out of the mysterious smoky chamber. "Dude, that was awesome!" they told each other. "When you think someone's coming toward you and then there's no one there....whoa." Finally a friendly young man led us into a space completely obscured by white fog. It was impossible to see more than two foot ahead, and the other people quickly dissolved into shadowy blobs. Trance music played as flashing lights and colors permeated the haze. And this is where it gets complicated to describe: I began to see patterns etched over my field of vision. The fog eliminates depth perception, so the constantly changing colors and patterns seemed to hover on the surface of my eyeballs. Some found it soothing, but I was terrified (and a little nauseated) by the complete disorientation.

ZEE is Op Art on a grand scale; much like Sol LeWitt's *Grids* or Josef Albers' squares, it uses optical reactions as a medium. The viewer's reaction overrides ordinary modes of understanding art. Content is irrelevant, and critique is obtuse, because the work is a physical experience, not an object of contemplation. Despite my nausea, *ZEE* is the most exciting work I've seen in a long time. It pushes the boundaries of perception in a completely unexpected way, making even the most avant-garde art seem conventional. I hope to see more from Kurt Hentschlagler in the future.



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