

## The Trompe-l'oeil Series

The Parkville Frame Gallery is honored to offer **The Trompe-l'oeil Series**. Trompe-l'oeil is a French phrase that means: to "deceive the eye". It is a technique in art that uses realistic imagery to create an optical illusion. We have collected several pictures that demonstrate the trompe-l'oeil process. There are also others to choose from.



***Girl in a picture frame*** (1641)  
Rembrandt van Rijn  
Royal Castle Museum, Warsaw

**Date painted:** 1641

**How originally painted:** Oil on panel

**Size:** 41.5 in x 29.9 inches

**Where on display:** Royal Castle Museum, Warsaw, Poland

**The Artist:** **Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn** was a Dutch draughtsman, painter, and printmaker. An innovative and prolific master in all three media.

**The Art:** ***Girl in a picture frame*** The sitter is framed by a feigned picture frame of which only the bottom and right side are visible. It is not a portrait, but a tronie. A **tronie** (16/17th-century Dutch for "face") is a common type, or group of types, of works common in Dutch Golden Age painting and Flemish Baroque painting that shows an exaggerated facial expression or a stock character in costume. It is related to the French word "trogne" which is slang for "mug" or head.



***Escaping Criticism*** (1874)  
Pere Borrell del Caso  
Collection of the Banco de España, Madrid

**Date painted:** 1874

**How originally painted:** Oil on canvas

**Size:** 29.8 x 24 inches

**Where on display:** Collection of the Banco de España, Madrid

**The Artist: Pere Borrell del Caso** (1835-1910) was a Spanish painter, illustrator, and engraver, known for his trompe l'oeil paintings; especially *Escaping Criticism*. He also painted portraits, which made up the bulk of his work, and created religious murals in the Nazarene style in Barcelona, Girona and Castellar del Vallès. These, however, were all destroyed during the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s.

**The Art:** This painting shows an ill-clothed boy who clammers out of a picture frame to enter the world outside. It is entitled 'Fugint de la crítica' ***Escaping Criticism***. Though its exact meaning or intention are unknown, it is not unlikely that Borrell referred to the conservative art critics of his days, who only wanted to see heroes and ethics, thus ignoring the vitality of the real world. The 'frame' above is part of the painting, but designed so that it can fit seamlessly into an actual picture frame.



***The Old Violin*** (1886)  
William Michael Harnett  
National Gallery of Art

**Date painted:** 1886

**How originally painted:** Oil on canvas

**Size:** 38 x 23-5/8 inches (image size)

**Where on display:** National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

**The Artist:** **William Michael Harnett** (1848-1892) was an Irish-American painter of the nineteenth century, whose fame may not have withstood the passage of time very well but who nonetheless was responsible for some excellent work in the *trompe l'œil* still life genre.

**The Art:** ***The Old Violin*** is one of Harnett's most famous paintings and a superb example of painted realism. The subject is deceptively simple; a violin, rendered in actual size, a sheet of music, a small newspaper clipping, and a blue envelope are shown against a background formed by a green and rusty-hinged wooden door. It created a sensation when first exhibited at the Cincinnati Industrial Exposition in 1886, where viewers were enthralled by the technical virtuosity of the picture. A local newspaper reported that "a policeman stands by it constantly, lest people reach over and attempt to see if the newspaper clipping is genuine by tearing it off".



***Staircase Group*** (1795)  
Charles Willson Peale  
Philadelphia Museum of Art

**Date painted:** 1795

**How originally painted:** Oil on canvas

**Size:** 7 feet 5-1/2 inches x 39-3/8 inches

**Where on display:** Philadelphia Museum of Art

**The Artist:** American artist **Charles Willson Peale** (1741 - 1827), who painted *Staircase Group* in 1795, lived in Philadelphia and amazed people with his art. In addition to being a painter, Charles Willson Peale was a politician, entrepreneur, soldier, scientist, inventor, and farmer, and is often called a true Renaissance man. As a boy, he served as an apprentice to a saddle-maker in his native Maryland. He soon discovered that he possessed a natural talent for painting and traveled to London in 1767 to study with Benjamin West (1738–1820), a successful American-born artist. Peale returned to America two years later and earned a living painting portraits and signs in Maryland, Virginia, and Philadelphia, where he settled in 1776.

**The Art: *Staircase Group*** This portrait of two young men, Raphaëlle Peale and Titian Ramsay Peale I, peer out at us from a curving staircase. They seem to invite us to walk right into this life-size painting and follow them upstairs. In fact, many viewers have been fooled into thinking that these are real people standing in a real staircase. As a part of the trick, the large painting is surrounded by a wooden doorframe instead of a picture frame. An actual step projects out from the bottom of the canvas. Even George Washington is believed to have tipped his hat to greet the young men when he first saw this work of art. Its fame has grown ever since.