American artist John Haberle’s career centered on his eyes. Producing deceptively convincing nineteenth-century trompe l’oeil paintings of quotidian objects, Haberle enticed his viewers to look closely, inducing them to puzzle over what was real and artificial. Yet as Haberle created the tightly painted mimetic surfaces that fooled the eyes of his viewers, his vision waned. Indeed, after completing *A Bachelor’s Drawer*—a tour de force in trompe l’oeil painting—in 1894, Haberle declared his eyes were ruined and that he was giving up reproductive work altogether. Scholars have attributed Haberle’s visual disability to the “simpler” compositions, “looser” style, and overall “inferiority” of later paintings like *Night* (c.1909).

This paper seeks an alternate vantage from which to understand and study Haberle’s oeuvre. Rather than utilizing his disability as an excuse or justification, I explore how the surfaces of Haberle’s paintings themselves register tensions between vision and blindness, seeing and not seeing. In particular, this study considers how the presence of spectacles, eyeglasses, and monocles in paintings like *A Bachelor’s Drawer* worked to depict the limitations of vision through instances of pictorial blindness. In other words, I examine how Haberle utilized the practice of making and seeing his trompe l’oeil paintings as a productive opportunity to meditate upon vision and visual disability. I contend that while partly functioning as manifestations of his failing vision, Haberle’s paintings more importantly compelled their viewers to perceive the process of sight, the limitations of the eye, and the possibilities of other kinds of seeing.