

Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentinian writer, once wrote a story called “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*.” In it he outlines the career of a writer whose central accomplishment is having created, word for word, an exact rendition of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*. Written in 1939, it is one of the hall-of-mirrors, Chinese-box stories collected in his book *Ficciones*. As with the other “fictions” there, the mind reels in the presence of its metaphysical doublings and conceptual labyrinths. Borges creates a model for a perfect fusion of form and content, but holds it out to dangle in a wind of fraud, insanity and absurdity. I don’t know if the art critic Clement Greenberg ever got around to reading the story, but his own insistence on the matching of form to content, though widely influential, eventually dangled in the same breeze. Still, it is one of the great aesthetic myths. Every generation of art since has been drawn in by its gravitational pull and set a positive value on reflexivity. Whatever else art does, it can mirror itself. The Toronto artists Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins have some fun with this idea. Their work *The Presence Meter*, shown at the 2004 Toronto International Art Fair, is a crisp minimal wall sculpture with a grid of small, shiny gauges within a lacquered, high-tech frame. It manifests a serious state of objecthood, yet its purpose is to lightly take the measure of those who approach to look. The result is a smart, ironic inversion of viewership. If Borges had seen it, he might have made Pierre Menard not only an author’s author but an interested collector.—RICHARD RHODES

JENNIFER MARMAN
and DANIEL BORINS
The Presence Meter 2003
Analogue panel meter,
starfire crystal, aluminum
support, ultra sonic sensors
1.42 x 2.74 m

PHOTO MATTHEW STYLIANOU

