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THE SCULPTURAL DOUBLE
2009

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From the book *Teresita Fernández:Blind Landscape*. Published by the USF Contemporary Art Museum and JRP-Ringier, 2009

In its contemporary conception, sculpture is a broad and difficult to locate notion. No longer entrenched in territorial debates, contemporary sculpture has emerged as a pursuit of conditions, relationships, and informed presences and absences, realized in fragments,series, combinations, and overlapping formulations. Though the viewer's experience is the implacable precedent for sculpture's contemporary aegis, sculptural practice remains powerfully unique because it exists both within the familiar world we know, and precisely outside of it. A doubled status, which permits both materials and forms to bridge between symbolic space and actual experience, to co-exist as commentary and witness to our spatial habits—informing not simply how we see the world, but how we value it. Few contemporary sculptors are able to bridge these gaps more persuasively than Teresita Fernández, who has explored, for over a decade, the loaded relationship between nature and perception in exhilarating spatial and material formulations. Though Fernandez has pursued this territory through a spectrum of approaches, including site specific projects, outdoor works, immersive installations, freestanding works, and wall works, I will focus on the latter two categories, as they adequately frame the works included within this exhibition, which is the occasion for this exploration of Fernández's work and practice.

Among Fernández's skills as a sculptor, none appears more significant than her ability to maneuver materials into a zone where they may occupy several resemblances—indeed several functions and spatial strategies—at once. Clouds, trees, water, and fire—in patterned formations of polished stainless steel, glass, onyx, graphite, and thread—double as screens, mirrors, and lenses, and vacillate between object and phenomenal experience. Harnessing the qualities of transparency, reflectivity, and depth into instruments meant to provide spectators with the synaesthetic links between disparate appearances, this overlapping multiplicity of visual structures is a key component to Fernández's sculptural logic, which posits the viewer within differing spatial orientations—part representational, part technological, and part topological.

No doubt, an aspect of Fernández's skill is rooted in her clear understanding of both the embodied dimension of spatial perception and the epistemological significance of visual formula. More, however, has to do with Fernández's keen awareness of the doubled status of materials in the sculptural realm: both what they phenomenally deliver to the viewer and what they remain coupled with in the world. Such is the quality of her conjunctive forms, which synthesize a matrix of individually coded materials with our fragmented, if not glitch-like memories of them. An attuned process, focused on working materials and forms through a complex intertwinement of bodily and cognitive-perceptual responses—prompting viewers to recall what they already know and re-perform their experience of them.

Fernández's *Vertigo (sotto in su)* of 2007 epitomizes such trajectories. The work is

comprised of eleven layers of mirror polished aluminum cut in an intricate arboreal pattern suspended high above the viewer, not unlike an immense, cascading tree branch.
The cantilevered form seems to resist its own volume and mass, visually extending far beyond its constructed means. Spectators catch reflections of themselves seeing—their body's own inscription of itself onto the perceptual field—gazing up into reflected patterns and projected shadows. Reflections repeat on other layers and extend out onto the wall, ceiling, and floor to form a penumbral theater of activity. The act of looking up, while disorienting, is targeted at making the synaesthetic links to the familiar act of gazing up into the fractured canopy of a tree. The scale, too, of *Vertigo* remains linked to familiar experience. The work delights in its one-to-one relationship to its abstracted resemblance and does not suppose a modeling away from such direct sensible experience. What *Vertigo* makes is—in effect—a second nature: a synecdochic parallel to standing under a tree, albeit through experiential and abstract means rather than depictive. In fact, *Vertigo* upends the traditions of pictorial staging.

There is no single perspective point from which a viewer can come to discover *Vertigo's* overall form. Rather, it appears from a distance as a collection of cantilevered and tiered, ultrathin strata of horizontal aluminum planes, floating in space, reflecting and refracting light, which the spectator attempts to gather into anamorphic sense by obliquely encircling its outer edges. Since the bottom of the work is overhead, it is only as the spectator approaches—as its underside becomes visible—that *Vertigo's* ultrathin strata gives way to broad flat expanses of reflective, patterned tracings of foliage. Indeed, understanding *Vertigo's* overall form involves moving back and forth across its bow to piece together—through movement and memory—an accumulated recall of all its patterned edges, folds, pockets, and depths. Since *Vertigo* is overhead it is only as the spectator arrives there—underneath the work—that they will realize how large this form is, stretching some 12 feet out off the wall and some 12 feet across the wall. Its multiple stacked planes, through which the viewer looks, merge and vacillate between object and illusion, disassembling and reassembling itself into sensible form as the viewer moves and shifts. Though drawn from the realm of everyday experience, such a view, which forces the spectator to physically conform (to look up and move around it), thwarts the frontal traditions of pictorialism, which relies on the wall to frame the work, and reinforces the works "picturesque" qualities.

Such a peripatetic view, grounded in the personal and bodily orientation of the viewer, is characteristic of the 18th-century conception of the picturesque, a Burkean concept to describe what did not fit within his two rational categories of the *beautiful* and the *sublime*. This third category was quickly absorbed into the tenets of landscape painting, landscape design, and later thinned down considerably into the growing practice of tourism. The anti-classical stance of the picturesque sought to upend the search for what was constant and universal, encouraging instead more itinerant, ephemeral, and contingent forms of viewing. The term has hardly been used in discussions of artworks since the 19th century except, interestingly, in Yve-Alain Bois' remarkable application of the notion in relation to Richard Serra's work. In his essay, Bois reports that Robert Smithson (a 20th-century proponent of the picturesque), upon seeing Serra's sculpture *Shift*, had spoken of the work's "picturesque quality." Qualities that suggest, "effects [which] cannot be determined a priori" and cast the viewer in a role as "someone who trusts more in the real

movement of his legs than in the fictive movement of his gaze."[1] Bois expands considerably on Smithson's perspective, though he limits his discussion of this relationship to Serra's outdoor works. While the picturesque was founded as an outdoor concept, it is completely possible to bring the fundamentals of Bois' claims indoors since the picturesque is not about natural purity or organicism but rather how elements could be ordered to extend our appreciation of them. Indeed, the picturesque was a process of progressively recognizing and organizing nature into a continually changing spatial sequence, which could not be comprehended at a glance. Such a consideration of the mobilizing force of the viewer is reaffirmed, albeit within a larger weave of shifting perspectives, in Fernández's works.

If we return once more to the view from *Vertigo's* underside, distinctions between these shifting perspectives can be made clearer. Unlike the overhead perspective or the topographical view of the map, the view from underneath Vertigo grounds the viewer in its very orientation. Smithson, despite his own interest in the picturesque, had an affinity for the overhead view in that it could establish a deeper range of situatedness in space and provide "feedback" between the object and the "site"—as broad as Smithson saw those spatiotemporal parameters to be (he surely would have been interested in satellite photography). As Bois points out, Serra, in fact, notices a contradiction in Smithson's reliance on both the picturesque and pictorial formats in a discussion about Smithson's *Spiral Jetty:* "What most people know of his Spiral Jetty, for example, is an image shot from a helicopter. When you actually see the work, it has none of that purely graphic character … But if you reduce sculpture to the flat plane of the photograph … [y]ou're denying the temporal experience of the work. You're not only reducing the sculpture to a different scale for the purposes of consumption, but you're denying the real content of the work."[2] As Serra indicates, the overhead photograph, while it does cognitively suggest great heights, manages to transform the vertiginous potential of depth into mere distance. A photograph rarely, if ever, invokes the phenomenal qualities of depth. If the photograph flattens depth, Fernández's layered *Vertigo* manages to instrumentalize it and turn it upside down. Here, depth—as opposed to the privileged peaks and cliffs of sublimity—is the realm of shadows and self-modeling. The effect of *Vertigo's* combined qualities of reflection and depth draw the viewer into a space charged with self-reflexive potential: as if—inversed—gazing into a reflecting pool.

If Fernández's *Vertigo* avoids pictorial staging and the potential for any single "gestalt" reading, and prefers instead the mobile operation of the viewer to engage the work spatially, then Fernández's wall works draw us into a distinct tension between picturesque (itinerant and mobile) and pictorial (frontal) forms of viewing. *Portrait (Blind Landscape)* epitomizes this dialectic. From a distance, *Blind Landscape* frames its mirrored surface against the wall as a pattern of leafy, organic growth. The outline of its arboreal form is cut from stainless steel and polished to a mirror finish on

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[1] Yve-Alain Bois, "A Picturesque Stroll around Clara-Clara," reprinted in October: The First Decade, 1976-1986,ed. Annette Michelson, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp, Joan Copjec, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1983, p. 346.

[2] Quoted by Yve-Alain Bois, "A Picturesque Stroll around Clara Clara," reprinted in October: The First Decade, 1976–1986, p. 343.

both sides in two receding layers, stacked and spaced evenly in relief off the wall, and spanning some 12 feet across. While the mirrored surface of *Blind Landscape* remains fixed along the pictorial plane of the wall, the conditions around its reflective planes are always in flux, as viewers move and shift indeterminately. Change—spurred by movement—is the amplified constant at the heart of Fernández's works. Views truncate, shift, and multiply as viewers move obliquely across the observational plane of its mirrored surface. At the same time, ambient light passes through the latticed form—layered reflections of vertiginous foliage recede through other layers of reflection and project a green halo of shadows and light on the wall behind it. Its green cast is created by fluorescent green enamel screened onto the surface of the back layer, which faces the wall and is invisible from the front. As the viewer shifts closer, what was clearly visible from a distance now disintegrates, sliding away from optical certainty, disappearing and reappearing, interlocking space, time, and material into a cinematic whole wherein viewers can no longer distinguish individual elements: a Baroque affect that further unlocks a perception of unlimited spatial approaches.

If *Vertigo* manages to avoid vernacular framing*, Portrait (Blind Landscape)* employs it in a dialectical push and pull, shifting the viewer from resemblance, at a perspectival distance, to the shifting, embodied view of the itinerant viewer. The threshold, between these pictorial and picturesque habits of spectatorship, is crossed when the viewer encounters their own reflection in the mirrored surfaces of *Vertigo* and *Blind Landscape*. When speaking of his own use of mirrors in his "non-sites," Smithson describes their potential to harness the qualities of reflection, as well as the illusory effect of transparency, making it so "one never knew what side of the mirror one is on."[3] As Smithson's quote suggests, mirrors appear capable of saddling the viewer with a simultaneous sense of looking through and looking back, of conjuring a second space—a floating perspective—which ties together disparate spatial registers (real, remembered, and imagined) into a co-presence. Such a combination of qualities is aimed at both reflecting the work's ambient and temporal boundaries, while projecting the viewer's attention outside of its given spatial coordinates. The significant achievement of Fernández's projective strategy is that it trusts in the viewers' ability to target the displacement within themselves through a kind of kinesthetic freefall that unites memories with the present. A momentary giving way to a Bergsonian state of "attention," where the past and the present, memories and experience may penetrate each other. To bridge, as Jonathan Crary describes Bergson's theory, the "moment in which memory had the capacity to rebuild the object of perception."[4]

This presents us, however, with a rather elastic notion of vision, one that draws sight into a faceted realm of relations where multiple modes of perception—from observational, to technologically aided, and virtually encoded—are simultaneously

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[3] Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," 1967, reprinted in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1996, p. 73.

[4] Jonathan Crary, "Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory," reprinted in *October the Second Decade*, *1986-1996*, ed. Rosalind E. Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Annette Michelson, Hal Foster, Denis Hollier, Silvia Kolbowski, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1997, p. 421.

available and active. Fernández's wall work, *Projection Screen (black onyx)*, functions much like a conjunction port for all three of these modes of viewing. The work is comprised of a patterned array of hundreds of smoothed half spheres of highly polished black onyx mounted directly on the wall in a strobing moiré pattern. Its edges are synched to the proportions of the now classic 4:3 screen mode, mustering the screen's all over compositional strategy as well as its "cultural force." A force which has, as scholar Anne Friedberg contends, "bound us" to an "ingrained virtuality of the senses," so that the physical register of the screen itself—awash in images or not—has become a "virtual window that renders the wall permeable to light and ventilation and that dramatically changes the materialities (and—perhaps more radically—the temporalities) of built space."[5] As the screen aspect of *Projection Screen* beckons and draws viewers, as screens do, to inhabit a projected realm, each small-orbed surface of onyx fights for its own moment of the viewer's micro-attention. Seeing here is not only peripatetic, but peripheral. The slightest shift in movement, and the screen's deep black absorption gives way to a glass-like shine, glints of white light track each convex surface, shifting and moving with each step the viewer takes, as she works her way in and out of sensible position. Moving closer, what seems like an impenetrable polished opacity opens to muted reflection: a concert of hundreds of fluid views of the entire space around the viewer cast into myriad pixelations of the televisual frame, and the viewer toggles back and forth as such, in a perpetual push and pull, from resemblance to parallax and back.

While Fernández's earliest installation pieces of the late 1990s amounted to complete transformations of interior spaces, her more recent works, which we are discussing here, appear, at first, more discreet, though in reality are no less engaged in the physical and cultural dynamics of the space they are destined to occupy, the space of the museum. And in this sense, Fernández's constructions are an assertive attempt to open new dimensional possibilities and ways of occupying such a space. The Minimalist reconsideration of the exhibition space signaled a radical shift away from more autonomous forms of viewing and presented opportunities for viewers to interact with architectural spaces in modes that brought "space" itself into the conceptual frame of the artwork.[6] But the Minimalist ideal of a space for art born bare of construction or signification—without recognizing it as a cultural framework—was an impossible myth. Indeed, the museum is more than a vast space that frames objects or in turn becomes reframed by objects, but a culturally specific space with deterministic functions. In this sense, Fernández's works engage the museum beyond

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[5] Anne Friedberg, "The Age of Windows," in The Virtual Window: from Alberti to Microsoft, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2006, p. 138.

[6] 6 "We are scanning the two ends of the gallery through the large doorways of which we can see the disembodied glow produced by two other Flavin's, each in an adjoining room … Both announce a kind of space-beyond which we are not yet in, but for which the light functions as the intelligible sign. We are having this experience, then, not in front of what could be called art, but in the midst of an oddly emptied yet grandiloquent space of which the museum itself—as a building—is somehow the object," Rosalind Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum," reprinted in October the Second Decade, 1986–1996, ed. Rosalind E. Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Annette Michelson, Hal Foster, Denis Hollier, Silvia Kolbowski, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1997, p.428.

the physical and phenomenological; and considering the museums' epistemic function in relation to Fernández's works, allows us to strip back another layer of revealing relations.

The assumption is that museums are in the business of preserving objects, acting on behalf of what Miguel Tamen terms as the "salvational function" of the museum. "In the case of things-in-museums," he describes, "this is the melancholy story of their moving away from their origins (which of course means their essence)."[7] His suggestion here is that upon entering the museum, an object loses its essence—it is somehow elsewhere, somewhere outside of the museum. What the museum then is managing is only a *trace* of the object, as the object—having entered a kind of vanished context—is now held in a perpetual state of incompleteness, an afterlife of sorts.[8] It is not a stretch to uncover how this sense of a vanished context continues as a contemporary ideal for exhibition spaces (galleries or museums). The genera of which, rooted in Minimalism, has been aptly described by Miwon Kwon: "The modern gallery/museum space … with its stark white walls, artificial lighting (no windows), controlled climate, and pristine architectonics, was perceived not solely in terms of basic dimensions and proportion but as an institutional disguise … The seemingly benign architectural features of a gallery/museum, in other words, were deemed to be coded mechanisms that *actively* disassociate the space of art from the outer world."[9] Without using the term "preservation," Kwon has described the physical conditions necessary to promote preservation: a building hermetically sealed from the light and air outside. To pivot here on preservation, it becomes interesting to parallel the preservationist drive of the museum to that of "nature," which has itself become a word synonymous with preservation. To parallel Tamen's claim of the museum's ability to strip objects of their context, Smithson once remarked: "There is nothing 'natural' about the Museum of Natural History."[10]

While nature has long served as a representational source for artists and, no doubt, many continue to find in nature a sense of refuge from modernity, the idea of nature has also come to typify a kind of over-ripe idealism—a hopeful belief of locating within its manifold structures a deeper social order. For Smithson, who ardently avoided organic ideals, the silt, rocks, shells, and gravel that piled up in his "non-

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[7] Miguel Tamen, "Preservation," in Friends of Interpretable Objects, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2001, p. 63–64.

[8] "The German word museul [museumlike] has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present. Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. Museums are the family sepulchers of works of art," Theodor W. Adorno, "Valery Proust Museum," reprinted in Prisms, Theodor W.

[9] Miwon Kwon, "Genealogy of Site Specificity," in One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2002, p. 13.

[10] 10 Robert Smithson, "The Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art," 1968, reprinted in Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings, p. 85.

sites," brought with them—simply in their materiality—the kind of unruliness and disorder that required its opposite: order and containment. In one sense, his "non-sites" were nature contained; a bounding box for the unbounded, scaled out mental formulas meant to bridge the banality of the modern, industrialized world with the unbounded chaos that is the constant state of entropy—our "real" nature. As he stated, "Nature is not subject to our systems."[11] If Smithson's "non-sites" brought literal traces from the outside world inside the preservationist space of the museum, Fernández's works exist as phenomenal traces of the world outside. Engaging viewers in a kinesthetic bind, a simultaneous register of both the very mechanisms of the museum which disassociate us from the outside world, and the fervent desire to perforate its very seal—albeit theatrically—through projective, penumbral and virtual means.

In this context, Fernández's constructions emerge as meticulous meditations, not only on how we see or fail to see nature, but on the desire-filled mechanisms and devices (the museum included), which frame and project the very light upon it—at once reclaiming our longing to see nature as a vehicle for shaping the self and dredging up the history of our assumed control over it. The subject of Fernández's work is not nature, then, nor its nostalgic preservation, but rather the culturally entrenched legacy of its signs, mediation, and observation. Her conjunctive forms do more than represent established forms, but rather reveal the problematized frame through which we first apprehended such frames Such is the logical trace of Fernández's *Ink Mirror*, the form of which refers to the 18th century painter's tool known as the Claude Glass: the small black reflective mirrors used by proponents of the picturesque to frame views of nature. Users of the glass would travel to the countryside in search of the picturesque, and when they happened upon a scene, they would—in a bizarre twist—turn their backs to it, and gaze into the glass to view its cropped, sepia-toned reflection in the palm of their hand.

Ink Mirror's large, black, rectangular frame lies horizontal and defiantly erect in what appears to be a bed of snow, a monument to the device's misty, proto-cinematic realm. As viewers standing before the work are compelled to unlock their static positioning and circumnavigate the work's edges, they monitor their movements along the way, gazing into the cloudy colorless view reflected in the cinematic frame, transforming the hermetic space of the museum into a picturesque view. The work is both surreal object and portallike instrument. Its shape and scale command an uncanny sense of belonging, a kind of Kubrickian stoicism that defies specific place and time—bridging the terrestrial with the imaginary, the present with the primordial. Its deep black surface draws viewers back into their senses, inducing a kind of temporal gray zone where the close and far edges of space blur and the concreteness of time becomes remote and solvent. Faded reflections of what was and what might be, filtering its surroundings down to a residue, and slowing the perception of movement to the bare magic of self-awareness.

Engaging sculpture's precise ability to bridge here and elsewhere, material and thought, the past and the present. Drawing viewer's attention to their own estranged

[11] Robert Smithson, "Art and Dialectics," reprinted in Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings, p. 371.

grapplings with the world they inhabit. Suggesting that nature, too, has been displaced in the mind, belying our waning belief in a piece of land unsoiled by civilization and our increasing acceptance of a world where humanity, nature, and artifice are in fact entwined, and always have been.