

Teresita Fernández
Soil Horizon
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New York



Teresita Fernández, *Soil Horizon 1*, 2024

Lehmann Maupin is pleased to present *Soil Horizon*, an exhibition of new work by New York based artist Teresita Fernández. Over the course of her decades-long career, Fernández's practice has been characterized by an expansive reimagining of what constitutes a landscape: from the subterranean to the cosmic, to contentious borderlines and borderlands. In *Soil Horizon*, the artist turns inward, to the elusive and numinous landscapes we carry within. Returning repeatedly to the question "Where am I?" as an emotive and conceptual point of origin, Fernández unravels the intimacies between matter, human beings, and places. The artist's subtle conceptual practice and material processes have positioned her at the forefront of contemporary art, cementing her place in the canon and contextualizing her work within art historical discourse on art and land.

Following *Soil Horizon* at Lehmann Maupin, SITE Santa Fe will present *Teresita Fernández / Robert Smithson*. Opening in July 2024, this two-artist exhibition will feature over 30 works by Fernández and mark the first time Robert Smithson's oeuvre has been placed in conversation with an artist working today. Other forthcoming projects include a monumental site-specific installation at the Detroit Institute of Arts to be unveiled in 2025. Fernández's ambitious project will mark the museum's first major installation in the Josephine F. & Walter B. Ford Great Hall, inaugurating a series of dynamic contemporary art activations.

In *Soil Horizon* Fernández debuts several bodies of work, including two large-scale sculptural pieces, a series of copper relief panels, and notably, her first film. Where previous exhibitions have focused more explicitly on the historical, socio-political, or elemental aspects of place, in *Soil Horizon* Fernández turns her attention to the inner realm, contemplating her coordinates through geological, cosmological, and existential lenses. The exhibition takes its title from a geology term used to describe the horizontal layers that make up what we consider earth, from the matrix of bedrock to the topmost layer of fertile soil. Each layer, or "horizon," has its own unique material characteristics, and, like a portrait of a place, each demarcates the chronology, or life, of the land whose soil profile it constitutes. Here, the term "soil horizon" is used metaphorically to imagine what is buried, in transition, or yet to emerge. In this exhibition Fernández contemplates the ground, asserting that living landscapes are conceptually "stacked"—embodying not only what we see around us, but also the many subtle and accumulated

layers of time, events, and matter that are always above and below, obscured beyond the limits of our immediate primary perception.

Featured prominently in the exhibition is the titular body of work—a series of copper panels with a luminous, immersive horizon as their throughline. The bottom of each *Soil Horizon* panel is sculpted from dimensional charcoal fragments, densely packed to create a solid ground. Crystalline layers of black volcanic sand and red iron-rich sand, sourced from two separate continents, merge in each composition, their interspersed, horizontal striations slowly dissolving into ascending color shifts. Above, Fernández creates an intricate stippled effect that alternately obscures and reveals the warm glow of the copper beneath, creating atmospheric skiescapes in which viewers catch glimpses of their blurred reflections. In these works, the artist envisions numinous landscapes that propose a more expansive idea of place—from the ancient, historical, and subterranean, to the futuristic and celestial.

Rising from the gallery floor is *Sunrise(Sunset)* a monumental sculpture made of cast concrete that extends 24 feet in length. The title refers to the commonly used epitaph that compares the revolution of a person's life and death cycle with that of the sun's 24-hour passage. Low to the ground plane, *Sunrise(Sunset)* gently arches to suggest the eclipsed shape of an invisible circle, or planetary body, interred in or rising up from the floor. The top of the sculpture features exposed aggregate made of multicolored rocks and minerals, while the polished sides of the work reveal the multiple, fluid strata of poured concrete, recalling the horizons of a soil profile. The sculpture's heavy, minimal presence exudes a somber gravitas that references a tumulus, or mound—a universal form used to mark a sacred place of burial.

Spanning the full length of the gallery's longest wall is the show's central installation, *Sky(Burial)*. The work is comprised of over 7,500 ceramic cubes, each uniquely glazed to create a saturated, vibrating array of earthen textures formed by the chemical reactions that occur during kiln-firing. The process mirrors, on an intimate scale, the epic geological processes of the earth's formation. The title *Sky(Burial)* refers to the Tibetan tradition of compassionately placing the deceased's body on a mountaintop to be consumed by birds and dispersed into the world in small fragments. Here, Fernández prompts viewers to recognize human beings as kindred matter and extension of land, drawing attention to the landscape of our

own bodies and our eternal intertwining with the cycles of the natural world.

Ordered in wide bands of earthy, colored strata, *Sky(Burial)* is bisected horizontally by a narrow gap of empty space. Despite its rich materiality, in this work Fernández draws the viewer's eye precisely to where no material is present—the threshold dividing the upper and lower realms, separating above and below. This space can be understood as a *bardo*, a liminal gap between two states of existence associated in Buddhism with the transition between life and death, death and rebirth. The concept is echoed in a series of delicate, intimately-scaled sculptures, also titled *Bardo* which consist of a miniature cross-section slab of polished jasper stone. In these works, Fernández imagines the absent matter above and below the natural stone material by casting the missing areas in plaster and rendering its subterranean characteristics with applications of banded, earth-toned colors.

Soil Horizon also features *Caribbean Cosmos(Earth)*, the newest work in Fernández's *Caribbean Cosmos* series. Composed of thousands of tiny ceramic tesserae, *Caribbean Cosmos(Earth)* is legible on both a micro and macro level, shifting between the exquisite details of each lush tile and the immense cosmic field that can be read as vast planetary reference points. In *Caribbean Cosmos(Earth)* and across each work in the exhibition, Fernández's intuitive understanding of scale, and how its manipulation can function to create a sense of intimacy, is evident.

The exhibition ends with *Cuajani*, Fernández's first foray into film. Co-directed as a collaborative project with artist Juan Carlos Alom, *Cuajani* is a 16mm black and white film that presents a poetic portrait of a timeless landscape. Shot intermittently over six years in the Viñales Valley, an iconic rural area in western Cuba, the work is characterized by the immersive sounds and images that portray the landscape as protagonist. Inverting the convention of a figure in a landscape, here the landscape is the central character itself, watching the family that lives on and moves through its distinct physical elements, including its primeval karst formations, dark caves, and ephemeral mist. The film imagines the living, breathing landscape perceiving itself and its inhabitants, with humans, flora, and fauna in meditative communion with one another and a shared consciousness with the land, as its diurnal and nocturnal turnings of everyday life unfold.

Cuajani presents landscape as a discrete living body, one whose edges extend deep below the surface of the earth as well as high above it. This holistic and multidimensional understanding of place is reflected across all of the work in the exhibition, from the sedimentary layers of *Sunrise(Sunset)* to the atmospheric dispersion of organic matter in *Sky(Burial)*. In *Soil Horizon*, Fernández asserts that there are no true boundaries between ourselves and the expansive landscapes that surround us. Instead, we are intrinsically enmeshed in both the physical and the temporal world—standing always at the continuous intersection between the past and future, situated precisely at the evocative threshold where the heavens meet the earth.

Teresita Fernández's work is characterized by an expansive rethinking of what constitutes landscape: from the subterranean to the cosmic, from national borders, to the more elusive psychic landscapes we carry within. Fernández unravels the intimacies between matter, human beings, and locations, and her luminous work poetically challenges ideas about land and landscape by exposing the history of colonization and the inherent violence embedded in how we imagine and define place, and, by extension, one another. Questions of power, visibility, and erasure are important tenets of Fernández's work, and she confronts these themes in subtle ways, insisting on intertwining beauty, the socio-political, the intimate, and the immense. Imbuing the landscape with an anthropomorphic sensibility, Fernández has said "You look at the landscape, but the landscape also looks back at you; Landscape is more about what you don't see than what you do see."



Fernández is a MacArthur Foundation Fellow and the recipient of numerous awards, including a Creative Capital Award; Meridian Cultural Diplomacy Award; Guggenheim Fellowship; Louis Comfort Tiffany Biennial Award; American Academy of

Rome Fellowship (AFAAR); and a National Endowment for the Arts Individual Artist's Grant in Visual Arts. In 2011, she was appointed by President Barack Obama to serve on the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts. She is the first Latina to serve on the 100-year-old federal panel, which advises the president and Congress on national matters of design and aesthetics. In 2016, she conceived and directed the U.S. Latinx Arts Futures Symposium with the Ford Foundation, which brought together artists, curators, museum directors, and scholars from across the country to discuss modes of visibility within cultural institutions.

Her work has been exhibited internationally at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; New Britain Museum of American Art; Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Phoenix Art Museum; Pérez Art Museum Miami; Harvard University, Boston; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Des Moines Art Center; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland; Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Smithsonian Museum of American Art; Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art; and Castello di Rivoli, Turin, among others. Fernández has also created numerous large-scale public sculptures, including at the Brooklyn Academy of Music; New Orleans Museum of Art; Ford Foundation, New York; and Madison Square Park. She lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Artist portrait by Axel Dupeux.

**LEHMANN MAUPIN**

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin co-founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996 in New York. Since inception, Lehmann Maupin has served as a leading contemporary art gallery with locations in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. For over 25 years, Lehmann Maupin has been instrumental in introducing international artists in new geographies and building long-lasting curatorial relationships. Known for championing diverse voices, the gallery's program proudly features artists whose work challenges notions of identity and shapes international culture. Today, the gallery has permanent locations in New York, Seoul, and London, as well as team members based in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore, and Palm Beach. In recent years, with growing opportunities in new markets, the gallery has opened seasonal spaces in Aspen, Palm Beach, Taipei, and Beijing.

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