

Art Lies March 2010

Teresita Fernández The Blanton Museum of Art

By Lawrence Jennings

The immediate effect of walking under Teresita Fernández' sculpture *Vertigo (sotto in su)* is to have one's intuitive sense of gravity thrown off kilter. Part of *Blind Landscape*, a mid-career survey at the Blanton Museum, the work features shaped planes of polished aluminum suspended above viewers' heads. The mirrored layers hang parallel to the floor, canopylike, and are cut to resemble foliage-like camouflage patterns. Countless openings in their surfaces allow light from above to shine through, casting intricate shadows on the adjacent wall. This complex interplay of changing light, overlapping shadows and stratified depth is reminiscent of looking upward through tree branches. However, any romantic or cliché view of nature is quickly dispelled, confounded by the sight of one's own reflection and that of the museum floor—by the out-of-body experience of looking down at oneself.

Portrait (Blind Landscape) seems to reference Spanish moss, while *Portrait (Blind Water)* resembles a glacial icefall. The unseen backsides of these otherwise metallic works are painted bright green and blue, respectively. As a result, light, reflected between the white wall, the colored backside, and layers of metal, creates a tinted glow in and around each work. These and other installations in the show bring to mind the perceptual effects of Op Art, specifically Bridget Riley's dot paintings from the mid 1960s. From a distance, *Projection Screen (Black Onyx)* appears to be hundreds of black circles arranged as a cinematic 4:3 rectangle on the wall. Closer inspection, however, reveals that the circles are actually convex onyx stones affixed firmly to the wall. The dark stones change in size near the work's edges, creating the illusion and the uneasy feeling that the wall is breathing in and out. Another perceptual oddity is that the solid stones are so slick that they look liquid, like globules of black oil. This illusion of material transformation, along with the dynamic patterning and the effect it has on the supporting wall all make for a kind of visual instability and volatility.

The dynamic patterning of *Projection Screen* is also a feature of the largest work in the show, appropriately titled *Epic*. Fernández installed thousands of small chunks of raw graphite across an expansive wall in a design suggestive of interconnected swarms of flying birds, insects or the charged particles of a dust cloud. The solid bits of drawing material and the smudges on the wall coalesce into a sprawling and turbulent topography. Other, fully three-dimensional works titled *Dune*, *Drawn Waters* and *Ink Mirror* also evoke artificial landscapes. In these works, beads become golden

sand, graphite becomes rocky terrain and marble dust becomes crystalline snow, respectively. All the works in *Blind Landscape* have a seductive pull that confounds the sense of sight, making one want to reach out and touch them. These abstracted landscapes are some of the most perceptually rewarding and sensual works of conceptual art that Texas has seen in a long time.

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