

## Art Forum: 'Teresita Fernández Blanton Museum of Art', by Laura Lindenberger Wellen, March, 2010

Teresita Fernández's *Vertigo (sotto in su)*, 2007, appears to be an artwork made from clouds. Precision-cut aluminum sheets hang in a stack from the ceiling, their biomorphic forms splintering reflected light and casting a cascade of overlapping shadows across the nearby walls; seen from across the gallery, the sculpture seems to dissolve in the surrounding space. But after moving directly beneath the piece and looking up, the viewer finds his or her own reflection staring down - the image is distorted: telescoped, fractured, and surrounded by the warm wood floor. (*Sotto in su* is a Renaissance foreshortening technique for painting figures on high ceilings.) Tracing relationships between the natural and the human, between landscapes that are found and those that are made, is at the heart of Fernández's sculptural projects.

In nature, "all mean egotism vanishes," Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: "I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all." And Fernández's works - as critic Gregory Volk argues in his catalogue essay - often elicit this transcendental immersion, dissolving the boundaries between sculpture, viewer, and environment. Simultaneously, however, ego is everywhere in this exhibition, as viewers find (and begin to look for) their own reflections in the polished aluminum, black fiberglass, stainless steel, and onyx beads. In *Portrait (Blind Landscape)* and *Portrait (Blind Water)* (both 2008), for example, sections of polished stainless steel are vertically suspended inches from the wall, each punctured (as are the aluminum panels in *Vertigo*) with organically curved holes. Here, the colored enamel Fernández applied to the backs of the sheets reacts off the gallery's white walls, so that softly hued halos encase the works. With green used for *Landscape* and blue for *Water*, the sculptures can be imagined to resemble, respectively, a leafy canopy and a frozen cascade of water. Drawn toward these shimmering surfaces, the viewer confronts his or her reflection straight on, broken by the holes, which teasingly add a third eyeball, a distorted cheek.

Fernández's sculptures also engage viewers by responding to their movement through space; the works are activated based on where you stand and how you walk around them. For instance, *Drawn Waters (Borrowdale)*, 2009, a monumental graphite waterfall that slides down to a pile of shiny rocks at its base, is best seen not in the gallery itself but from the atrium. There, the Blanton has permanently installed Fernández's *Stacked Waters*, layers of blue cast-acrylic panels lining the walls. (The piece was commissioned last year.) When *Drawn Waters* is seen framed by *Stacked Waters's* azure surfaces, the effect is magical, even sublime, and it draws the whole building into the artist's splendid imagining of water.

The rendering of light in Fernández's works is enigmatic yet alluringly simple. In *Eruption (Large)*, 2005, a slightly recessed platform painted orange and red and filled with tiny transparent glass beads casts bright, colored reflections on the ceiling. The effect recurs in *Dune*, 2002, in which curved bands of painted aluminum - also recessed and filled with beads - form an amphitheater-shaped structure. While the beads sometimes look like the scales of lizard skin, the plywood-color aluminum, when viewed from certain angles, replicate a desert glare. In these two works, the structures themselves are less interesting than the shimmering effects they produce. Further, compared with the gray and silver surfaces dominating the show, these sculptures are surprisingly warm and colorful.

Throughout "Blind Landscape" the natural is evinced by the industrial, offering an insightful meditation on our encounters with the natural world, especially as it is experienced in the constructed landscapes of our urban spaces. Like finding small patches of greenery sprouting up through cracks in the sidewalk, or glimpsing a reflection of a sunset caught by the glassy surfaces of skyscrapers, encountering these works elicits surprise and wonder. And, as we flicker in and out of the picture, Fernández reminds us how fragile our place in the landscape is.