

ARTFORUM

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REVIEWS

Teresita Fernández
LEHMANN MAUPIN
By Frances Richard

Ever since Narcissus glimpsed his likeness in a pool, Western culture has worried about the mirror's deathly power of enchantment. The pool, as described in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, is unnatural, untouched by falling leaves, and never visited by animals. It exists only to captivate the boy whose name is etymologically related to "narcotic." Lacan had some of this in mind when he spoke about the "captation" of the infant by the imago in the mirror stage. Then there is the Claude glass, the convex black mirror that pensive Romantics carried on their excursions toward the picturesque. Movie, television, and computer screens are black mirrors when turned off, narcissistic reflectors when turned on. And what of sheesh mahals, sumptuous mirror-tiled rooms that graced the palaces of Mughal emperors? Or Aztec disks of polished obsidian, mystical containers for Tezcatlipoca, god of the smoking mirror? "You must travel at random," Tezcatlipoca supposedly told [Robert Smithson](#) in 1969 (reported in "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan"). "You risk getting lost in the thickets, but that is the only way to make art."

It is and is not fair to cite all this as preamble to Teresita Fernandez's recent work. She seems to have been thinking about these things and more, which is a load to lay on the five works in her recent show. Three of these were arrays of small cabochon mirrors, some of silvered glass, others of black onyx. These lapidary droplets were not scattered but positioned on the wall in careful patterns: a glacial cascade in *Mirror Canopy* (all works 2007), a pixellated rectangle in *Projection Screen (Black Onyx)*, and positive-negative squares, one silver and one black, in *Longing (Double Portrait)*. Implied were narcissistic desire and the infinite regress of dark into light, self into other, identity into media.

Two larger sculptures elaborate these ideas while also invoking "scenery" as an artificial surface reflecting human egotism. Ink [Mirror](#) (Landscape) is a fourteen-and-a-half-foot-long block of black fiberglass, polished to a sheen and set horizontally in a bed of snowy marble dust. A Kubrickian obelisk flipped sideways to receive a projection of its own base, an uncannily flawless rock, it gave back the room's and the visitor's image as in a glass darkly. *Vertigo (Sotto in su)* hung from the ceiling (its subtitle means "seen from below"). Receding tiers of polished aluminum cut into an irregular lattice, the work is cantilevered like a frozen waterfall or branches in an ice storm, throwing dappled glints and casting back a foreshortened vision of the viewer's face.

These are undeniably beautiful, intelligent artworks, closely aligned with Fernandez's consistent interest in problems of perception and the cultural fabrication of "nature." Delicate moments arose--the discovery that silver cabochons reflect upside down, onyx ones right side up; the smoky haze of illusory darkness that leaked from the black dots onto the wall; a suggestion of the marble snow as an irregular page marked by the blot of Ink Mirror. Fernandez, however, never travels at random, never gets lost in the thickets. The mirror's mythical task is to seduce, delude, and enlighten; these versions of the mytheme were chilly, perfect, closed. Of course, mirrors have always been status symbols as well as reservoirs of the diabolical and divine. But, expensive and impervious, precision-machined, Fernandez's installation was a hermetic sublime, a bit too reminiscent of a corporate lobby. Hard edges and [cold](#) finishes are important to her practice. In its radical ambiguity, however, the mirror needs some organic latitude. Otherwise it risks becoming just another simulacral bauble.