

Art in America

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Teresita Fernández at Miami Art Museum

In her installation last season at MAM, Teresita Fernández continued her minimalist reveries on the art and idea of landscape. Over the past several years she has exhibited frequently in the U.S. and abroad; her recent pieces tend to evoke the elements of light, shadow, water, clouds and foliage, and their ordering in space, which have enchanted gardeners and painters for centuries. She signals her contemporary viewpoint on this long tradition by using late 20th-century synthetic materials, clearly revealed and juxtaposed. When she is most successful, as in this work, her visual cues skillfully evoke our powerful memories of landscapes we have experienced in both nature and art. Magically, we can imagine a cluster of plastic cubes as a cloud, or a surface of glass beads as a shimmering pond.

For MAM, Fernández designed an oval room. At varying levels on its curving white walls hovered amorphous configurations of small acrylic cubes, set more densely at the center and thinning out at the edges. The transparent cubes were colored only on their back sides in several shades of blue, so that they seemed to float just in front of the wall's surface. On the floor, two irregularly curving platforms were covered with literally millions of tiny, clear glass spheres through which were refracted dappled shapes of light and shadow. The general effect of the piece was of softly shifting atmospheres and reflecting surfaces: cool, sensual, serene and conceptually rigorous.

Fernández, like many artists before her, engages in a dialogue between artifice and nature. In considering the history of this dialogue, Seurat's lyrical, atomized landscapes as well as Monet's paintings of water lilies seem especially relevant. In her thoughtful contribution to the discourse, Fernández recalls Monet's oval rooms lined with

water-garden paintings at the Orangerie in Paris. Monet made these installations with a generous hope that they would serve as a refuge and refreshment for harried urbanites. Fernández, using a new vocabulary of forms and materials, also creates artificial environments that generously make a place for connecting to nature in imagination. Evoking neither the awesome storms and threatening avalanches often associated in the literature of landscape with the masculine "sublime," nor quite the "beautiful" version of nature, modest and domesticated, that has been associated with the feminine, Fernández constructs a nature that has a contemporary, synthetic beauty in which femininity is imbued with toughness.

—Paula Harper



Teresita Fernández: *Midnight* (on wall) and *Twin* (on floor), both 2002, mixed mediums; at Miami Art Museum.

