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Teresita Fernandez
Lehmann Maupin Gallery
By Naief Yehya

The mobilized gaze is defined as a form of perception that can provide spatial and/or temporal mobility even if the physical body is static. As Anne Friedberg stated in her influential book, *Window Shopping*, the mobilized gaze is an experience that changed the relationship between sight and bodily movement. During the nineteenth century, a great variety of devices intended to mobilize the gaze were invented in Europe and the United States. These creations included machines such as the moving walkway, steam train, and escalator, as well as architectural structures such as, exhibition halls, department stores, winter gardens, movie theaters, and arcades, which offered the illusion of displacement through artifices and tricks like dioramas, moving pictures, and even packaged tourism. Suddenly, the most unsuspected landscapes can pass the field of vision as a glimpse, past and future collide in the present and a *promenade* can become a commodified experience. The mobilized gaze is the central characteristic of the *flâneur*, which Anne Friedberg defines as someone who finds pleasure in strolling through "imaginary elsewheres." *Flâneur* is a mostly delightful wandering with a mix of pleasure and nostalgia that allows the urban dweller to experience the *rêverie* of traveling with minimal effort, as well as the witnessing of mediated images of the wild or the exotic.

Brooklyn-based, Miami-born artist, Teresita Fernández, seems to have adopted the ideas of the mobilized gaze and of the *flâneur* to construct cinematic illusions of natural phenomena. Her pieces—sculptures, paintings, installations and gardens—not only require, for the most part, a mobilized gaze to be fully appreciated, but they also involve highly symbolic representations of nature. As is often the case in modern art, Fernández's visions of nature and landscape deal more with their historical and cultural image and icons than with reality. She creates subtle metaphors of elements in flux, in the form of minimalist abstractions; she portrays Western (and more recently Japanese) ideas, and fictions of nature with the most aseptic materials. Her work is clean and cold, and any trace of drama is erased by the use of patterns and geometry. Nevertheless, this apparently severe formalism is juxtaposed with a cool emotional, and up to a certain point, playful sensuality.

During the last few years, Fernández has focused on synthesizing the essence and mutability of water, shadows, smoke and even a sand dune. In her most recent show, she focuses on combustion and its effects. Her seven pieces on display at Lehmann Maupin Gallery are evocations of fire, lava, and smoke. Her elegant and striking pieces can almost be perceived as mathematical models of earth's phenomena. As you enter the gallery, your first impression is to look at what seems to be representations of the universe, nebulae, and galaxies. Upon careful inspection, cosmic visions disappear, leaving smoke and fire in their place. Thinking of the origin of the universe and the formation of the planets is inevitable.

On the floor she has placed two pieces called *Eruption*, images that conjure memories of lava and the interior of a volcano. These paintings are covered with glass beads that give the work an eerie shimmering quality. Transparency is one of the most notable aspects of the three paintings on display on the adjacent walls. The series, *Smoke*, is made of three, almost abstract multi-layered paintings. While the glass spheres create an illusion of depth in *Eruption*, a similar effect is produced by a layer of hundreds of circles that create the illusion of movement in the *Smoke* paintings.

Fernandez's work constantly involves visual effects, transparencies, reflections, and refractions. Therefore, light plays a major part in her pieces. On this occasion, the most notable use of optic physics is the wall piece, *Sfumato*, a pattern of glass cubes that produces a fascinating mesh of refracted light rays. *Sfumato*, meaning "smoky" in Italian, is also a technique of Renaissance oil painting (the term was coined by its most skilled practitioner: Leonardo da Vinci) and consists of applying translucent layers of very thin paint to soften edges and blur shadows, for the purpose of creating perceptions of depth, volume, and form, just as Fernández did in the three *Smoke* paintings. The reference to the Renaissance, the period when art and science came together, seems obvious and appropriate for Fernández, an artist who considers (as a scientist may) that to define one's work is to come up with "an interesting problem."

Finally, the most striking and powerful piece in the show is *Fire*, a circle of virtual fire composed of thousands of richly-colored silk threads from the prestigious and almost legendary textile manufacturer, Scalamantré. The layers of thread, arranged in two concentric circles and painted in gradations of intense red, orange, and yellow are held between two rings and suspended from the ceiling, creating a cinematic illusion. The threads are placed in such a way that as the viewer moves around (strolling as a *flâneur*) they create a sensation of movement. *Fire* is an imposing structure (eight feet high and twelve feet in diameter) that evokes the enigmatic enclosures of her show, *Borrowed Landscapes* (Deitch Projects, 1999), those strangely illuminated spaces that cannot be penetrated. Fernández is very successful at enticing the viewer to become a *flâneur*, but

even more relevant is that she keeps updating the language of minimalism with her impressive simplicity and powerful cinematic evocations.