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Roni Horn Presents Sculptures At Nasher Sculpture Center And Multimedia At Hauser & Wirth

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By Adam Lehrer

Roni Horn's work, at times, presents itself as impenetrable: intellectual, theoretical, and deeply conceptual. But despite the perceived inscrutability and the diverse mediums she employs (including drawing, sculpture, photography, artist's books, and installations), her central themes are actually quite evident and consistent from exhibition to exhibition. Horn often presents repeated motifs that while looking similar, actually reveal a universe constantly in flux and in change: a portrait subject photographed repeatedly, revealing several small shifts in pose, posture, or expression, landscape images documenting the natural shifts that take place in the nature of Iceland, and explorations into the poetry of Emily Dickinson that examine the poet's androgyny and its relation to Horn's own complicated and shifting identity. With an exhibition of photographs, drawings and sculptures at [Hauser and Wirth](#) and an exhibition solely of sculptures at [Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas](#), one can ascertain those consistent themes in Horn's diverse output. Whether considering an isolated portion of her practice, like the sculptures in Dallas, or a more encompassing vision of her multimedia practice, like the show at Hauser and Wirth, one still finds thematic cohesion and conceptual clarity in Horn's overall vision. She is a deeply successful and confident fine artist.



Courtesy of Nasher Sculpture Center
Roni Horn, 'Untitled ("She was frightened of mice, snakes, frogs, sparrows, leeches, thunder, cold water, draughts, horses, goats, red-haired humans, and black cats..)," 2013-15

For Horn to present her light cast sculptures alone, she required a perfect architectural space that could accurately presents the sculptures' abilities to capture light and alter in presentation throughout the course of a day. Art collector Raymond Nasher commissioned architect Renzo Piano (The Whitney Museum, Georges Pompidou Center in Paris, and the de Menil Collection in Houston) to design the building. Piano designed the main exhibition space with a glass ceiling, so natural light manages to keep the space illuminated mostly without the aid of spotlights or other artificial lighting. Horn decided that this was the only space where she would ever show the light cast sculptures alone and without her other mediums, or "idioms" as Horn calls them. The light cast sculptures at the Nasher are her most recent of these types of

works, and not to mention the biggest and heaviest with each individual sculpture weighing over 10,000 pounds. The sculptures come in sets of two (one piece is two sculptures), consistent with Horn's long-standing interest in presenting objects in pairs, and are round and stand at about 4 ft., with each sculpture taking on a pale shade of colors. In direct dialog with Horn's greater output, the sculptures

look repetitious upon initial viewing, but they actually correlate in color to changes in light and, inevitably, weather. Horn had the curators remove screen panels from the glass ceiling to even allow more light to enter the space. They are strikingly beautiful art works alone, and it'd be easy to admire them simply as feats of design and filling architectural space. But they are conceptual works that call attention to the environment that is constantly shifting, morphing, changing.



Ron Amstutz (courtesy of Hauser & Wirth)
Roni Horn, 'The Selected Gifts, 1974 - 2015,' (2015-2016)

There are two sets of the glass cast sculptures on view at Horn's current exhibition at Hauser and Wirth in New York that are displayed with two other long-term Horn projects, the 'Selected Gifts' (1975-1915) series of photographs that she has been working on consistently since the seventies and a new series of drawings, that work together to give a broad view of Horn's practice while still examining a singular cohesion in the work. In this context, the glass cast sculptures' being shown in pairs belies how we should consider Horn's art work: different facets of one whole. The 'Selected Gifts' photographs chronicle Horn's documenting of gifts she has received from 1974 to 2015: a fossilized dinosaur egg, leather gloves, two copies of Djuna Barnes' 'The Book of Repulsive Women', and a handmade olive tree are among the gifts Horn shot against a studio portrait white backdrop, a cold and mechanical photographic approach that belies the sentimentality inherent to receiving gifts. Horn considers the gifts to be a kind of "vicarious self-portrait," in that she is relying on friends' mental projections of her to color her personality from an outside perspective. How do we choose a gift for someone? When strapped for cash, we try to find that person a treasure that is particular to that person's own values and desires. In 'Selected Gifts,' Horn documents how her identity and personality have progressed and shifted through the eyes of those close to her.



Ron Amstutz (courtesy of Hauser & Wirth)
Roni Horn, 'The Dog's Chorus. Let Slip a Bat Out of Hell,' (2016)

Finally, two new sets of drawings, 'The Dog's Chorus' and 'The Rose Problem,' chart Horn's interest in the construction and deconstruction of language as metaphor for the shifting stasis of identity and humanity. These drawings are made from Horn slicing up an original drawing using a Stanley knife and reassembling the fragments of language into something new. 'The Dog's Chorus' combines lines from Shakespeare's 'Julius Caesar' with overused cultural turns of phrase. There is repeated use of lines like "let slip a dead certainty," the Shakespeare line, with phrases such as "bat out of hell." It's funny and should be considered as so, but it also uses the mashup of high and low language to draw a more complete map of human identity: complicated, occasionally contradictory, and always shifting. 'The Rose Problem' finds Horn using common phrases, "a rose is a rose is a rose" and "coming up smelling like a rose," and splices the language up into various iterations for silly humor but also as a metaphor for identity itself, Horn believes. Even though there are 48 drawings all together, she views them all as one work built on the same piece of language. In this context, language is identity: one single entity that can be perceived in countless ways and manifest in even more ways.

Sometimes, when successful conceptual artists opt for more traditional means of art making, like painting or sculpting, the artist's conceptual intent feels dulled and the work reads as insecure. It can feel like the artist has lost faith in his/her ideas and medium, so he/she needs to revert back to older methods to prove to themselves that they are artists in the traditional senses. For example, photographer Nick Waplington's abstract paintings have none of the political gut punch of his poignant documentary photographs. Similarly, one feels slightly cheated when a great conceptual artist like John Baldessari commissions sign painters to present realist pictures under his name, as if his work wasn't strong enough without the realism. But Roni Horn has always been a multimedia artist through and through, and her central conceptual intent is so strong that you can easily read it whether considering the larger practice of her drawings, photographs, sculptures, and performances, or simply considering her as a sculptor alone. Horn examines identity in all its inconsistencies and permutations.