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Roni Horn: Nasher Sculpture Center

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By John Zotos



Roni Horn, *Untitled* ("Supervise things closely for seven years, with the help of your diving girl. Any time after that you may open your oyster, and you have about one chance in twenty of owning a marketable pearl, and a small but equally exciting chance of having cooked up something really valuable."), 2014, solid cast glass with as-cast surfaces, height: 50 1/2, diameter: 53-56 inches tapered. Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth, New York.

For the first time at Dallas' iconic Nasher Sculpture Center, curators have allowed for a physical alteration of the building: removing two rows of the site-specific oculi in the ceiling of the Renzo Piano structure. The change was made in order to accommodate American artist Roni Horn's request for additional light to illuminate her seven massive glass art sculptures (each weighs approximately 5 tons, is over 50 inches in diameter and over 50 inches tall), on view in the museum's main gallery through Aug. 20. *Roni Horn* is the artist's first museum exhibition in the U.S. since 2010, and this is the first time the Center has installed artworks of this scale.

Horn is equally talented working along the lines of drawing, photography, and artist's books, all of which have been exhibited with her sculptures. She has explored the possibilities of glass as an art medium since the early 90s and has come full cycle in this current exhibition, using optical-grade glass to realize her most sophisticated and labor-intensive versions to date. Horn's industrial fabrication process of pouring molten glass into molds results in unique works of art that each take up to ten months to finish. The resulting pieces are imposing cylindrical forms individually cast in various colors that exude weight and presence.

The installation allows plenty of room for the sculptures to breathe, with the majority taking up the central section of the gallery, fanning out on the north side with a purple piece and to the south with lime green, the strongest colors of the group. With their austere and reductive formal aspects, Horn's work has been associated with both Minimalism and Postminimalism, through which she links to the present by privileging sensuous surfaces. Whereas the Minimalists strove to explore seriality and repetitive motifs that erased the hand of the artist, Horn's sculptures reveal the process of their making.

They have a frosty matte exterior with seams from the molds that punctuate the surface, revealing their fabricated nature, clearly representative of the artist's intent to argue that each one is unique, rather than an assembly of the same sculpture in different colors. This aesthetic is at odds with Postmodernism, a recent period in art whose way was paved by Minimalism, as argued by Hal Foster in *The Crux of Minimalism*. In Postmodern theory, copies of works of art contend with the originals for superiority, undermining the notion of uniqueness, replacing authenticity with ambiguity.

For example, in Horn's photographic series featuring the French actress Isabelle Huppert, images of the subject in countless expressions were captured, each the same face and yet unique. This interest in the body informs what the viewer sees in the sculptures at the Nasher in that the works occupy space in a social context, becoming bodies in themselves. Visitors in the gallery could be said to experience countless versions of the pieces because they change in hue and density, sometimes glowing with energy like living beings, depending on the light and time of day.

The artist titles the pieces with references drawn from literary texts as a device meant to induce a dialog. The wondrous frosty surface that cloaks each piece could easily provoke a viewer to perceive hollow frozen ice forms filled to the brim with water. The glass at the topmost portion is fire-cured so it's clear, forming a concave lens that compresses the space between the viewer looking in, and the floor below. This additional layer of optical vision and perception only occurs when the viewer finally gets closest to a particular sculpture, an experience that deepens Horn's decidedly complex meditation on intimacy, contemplation, and human interaction.