

Art in America

March 2003

Teresita Fernández at Lehmann Maupin

If Louis Comfort Tiffany had ever entertained the improbable notion of designing a stained-glass waterslide, it might have looked something like Teresita Fernández's *Waterfall* (2000), an elegant wave-shaped ramp made up of translucent horizontal bands of pearlescent plastic cascading floorward from a height of 12 feet. With its tremendous yet brittle mass possessing all the delicate malevolence of a tropical cataract or the perfect ocean breaker, *Waterfall* was the centerpiece of Fernández's first solo show at Lehmann Maupin, in which she used glass or glass-like substances to explore the more lush and luminous aspects of Minimalism.

In all, the artist arranged an ensemble of four sculptural works that allude to natural substances or phenomena (water, wind, sand) while remaining abstract enough to act directly upon the senses of the observer. *Dune* (2002), an aerodynamic zigguratlike object, functioned as a sort of torqued backstop for the arrested fluidity of *Waterfall*. On closer inspection, *Dune* revealed itself not as

a single object but rather as a myriad of tiny glass balls refracting the ambient light differently according to the angle of view, the array contained by an ascending series of tiered aluminum trays. As a sculpture, *Dune* looked like a miniaturized retro-futurist Miami Beach resort (Fernández is a native Floridian), featuring banks of stacked balconies and a curvaceously swept-back profile. As an optical experience, with its beaded flanks appearing sometimes buff colored, other times a pale aqua, *Dune* simulated the miragelike effects produced by the convergence of brilliant light, water and a multitude of sand grains.

The phenomenon of a mass of distinct elements perceptually coalescing into a mutable whole was embodied again in *Passerby* and *7:42 P.M.* (both 2002), two related wall pieces meant to describe neither a substance nor an object but rather the atmospheric conditions of a particular place and time of day—presumably a balmy summer evening. Composed of hundreds of individually hued acrylic cubes seemingly blown scattershot across the wall, the azure swarm seemed to have briefly alighted upon the vertical surface, poised to reverse direction or disperse altogether. Fernández's ability to use real or ersatz glass in a manner that is closely analogous to, yet gracefully abstracted from, nature, is the key to the understated pleasures of her work. She manages to tease from her prismatic materials a breathable organic life while carefully skirting the merely decorative.

—James Trainor

View of Teresita Fernández's *Waterfall* (left), 2000, aluminum, plastic, 12 by 12 by 28 feet, and *Dune* (right), 2002, painted aluminum and glass beads, dimensions variable; at Lehmann Maupin.

