Roni Horn was born in 1955 in New York, where she continues to live and work. She received a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1975 and an MFA from Yale University in 1978. Since her first solo show at the Kunstraum in Munich in 1980, she has exhibited widely and was included in such major shows as the Venice Biennale (1997) and Documenta IX (1992). Recent one-person exhibitions were presented at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2000), Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1999), De Pont Foundation for Contemporary Art, Tilburg, the Netherlands (1998, 1994), Fotomuseum Winterthur (1997), and the Werner Center for the Arts, Columbus (1996). Horn's Things That Happen Again (1996) has been a long-term exhibition at the Chiat Foundation in Meza, Texas, since 1989.

selected bibliography, chronologically arranged


1. This is Me, This is You, 1999–2000 96 photographs each 12 1/2 x 10 inches Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

2. Some Thomas, 2000
32 of 80 photographs each 25 x 38 inches Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

3. Clouded and Cloud (Gray), 2001
28 photographs: 14 of 16 cloud images, 27 x 35 inches; 14 of 16 clown images, 27 x 27 inches Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

4. Untitled (Yes)-1, 2001
glass 46 x 26 x 17 inches Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

5. Untitled (Yes)-2, 2001
glass 46 x 26 x 17 inches Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York


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Part I: October 17, 2001–February 17, 2002

"Blah, blah, blah, your hair;
Blah, blah, blah, your eyes;
Blah, blah, blah, care,
Blah, blah, blah, blah, adies."—George and Ira Gershwin, "Blah, blah, blah" (1930)

Part II: February 27–June 18, 2002

"Blah, blah, blah, blah, moon,
Blah, blah, blah, above;
Blah, blah, blah, croon,
Blah, blah, blah, love."—George and Ira Gershwin, "Blah, blah, blah" (1930)
Roni Horn

"Blah, Blah, Blah," the Gershwins's satirical skewing of sentiments now so routine as to be stultified, leaves the entrant to Roni Horn's exhibition. Is her title a forewarning? Or an apologia? Or a diversion? Interpreting its role poses the dilemma of how certain recurrent familiar but fundamental experiences—encounters with faces and clouds, eyes and skies—might be remanent, how they might be vilified, so that, unbidden and unrehearsed, they become once more arresting and affecting.

Questions of difference and identity are the foundation stones of Horn's practice. This two-part exhibition was specifically devised to manifest such concerns, in both its form and content. Combining two sculptures and three photographically based series, each part is in similar structure, though different in substance. Each installment includes the two-part work. This is Me, This is You (1999–2000), which is presented on opposite walls of the entrance gallery, as well as Untitled (White) and Untitled (Yes)–2 (both 2001), two works—each a glass block; a crystal clear, whose radiantly transparent, the other black, a depthless mirror. The remaining works will change.

Those who visit only one part will have a circumscribed experience; for the whole is relational, critically engaging the viewer as an essential agent who interacts with each of the parts. That interaction is crucial; for it is only in memory—over time—that these dual experiences come together to disclose the bifurcated unity. Circumstantial differences also infect each visitor's experience. For example, contingencies of light and weather may subtly alter the effect and impact of the sculpture in the late afternoon, direct sun making the external curve of the glass meniscus animate this volatile transparent work in vain but unpredictable ways; more sizable shifts in the cool northern light in the room containing its companion alters the changing reflections, generated as the spectator circles it around, subjecting it to the slow searching scrutiny. But, even the sequence in which this pair is initially encountered can forever inflect one's reading. Whether one sculpture becomes and remains dominant or determining may depend on the order in which they were initially discovered. On finding the first, one neither automatically nor necessarily anticipates the second. These are the two motifs, one can no longer engage with—one without being reminded of its antipode. Thereafter the two are indebted conjured, seen in relation to each other, complementing and detracting in equal parts.

Autonomy—one of the most prized qualities of the quintessential modernist artwork—is undermined by manifesting evident the object's contextual dependencies—dependencies derived from the framing conditions of site, context, institution, linguistics, and semantics, as well as conditions inherent in the very act of observation. While acknowledging these factors as integral to experiencing any work of art, Horn accentuates the specificity of the encounter, individuating it by stressing the work's quickly, locking it into the here and now of the sensed moment. Still, she keeps alive awareness that this experience will inevitably feel different in memory—that is, with hindsight—and yet, when overlaid by a subsequent encounter, and then by further retrospective reflection, and so on . . . .

Fundamental to that dialectic is the interplay between stasis and motility, between the fleeting and the fixed. This dynamic is inscribed into each of the works in the show, situated in different ways, and to varying degrees. The forms of the sculptures are made finite by slowly solidifying molten glass, an everyday material, transfixing in its raw solid state. The casting and cooling process can be traced via numerous telling details, for in its final appearance the work betrays a certain level of contingency, of unpredictability.

Elusive, amorphous, volatile, and restless, the surface of the river in "Blah, Blah, Blah," the Gershwins's satirical skewing of sentiments now so routine as to be stultified, teases the entrant to Roni Horn's exhibition. Is her title a forewarning? Or an apologia? Or a diversion?

Interpreting its role poses the dilemma of how certain recurrent phenomena and leprous are explored in a series of alternating images of the two motifs. Given that dissolution or erosion is inevitable, mutability of appearance is integral to the phenomenon of the cloud. The opposite is proposed for the clowd, for it is a constant, a symbolic form whose naivete is riddled in a conventionally defined appearance, one that occults the depth of the past—"the player—who temporarily assumes that guise. Here, the title assumes heightened significance: the misspelling that melds one motif with the other; confusing grammar but making sense nonetheless, adds a dimension possible only in a text that is read. Sometimes tangentially, sometimes directly, language in Horn's art vis à vis with vision as the most basic means of making sense of the world, of shaping experience. Only rarely are the two motifs seen to be segment with each other, as in this title, which succinctly embodies aspects of meaning that cannot otherwise be stated or visualized; that is, horn's use of the word "meaning" to mean the word "meaning." (Roni Horn, "Five Questions: By Way of Introduction," interview by Laurent Bosse, in Roni Horn: Inner Geography [Paris: Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1999], p. 9.)

Taken with a point-and-shoot camera, the panoply of images of a young girl that make up This is Me, This is You (1999–2000) is presented in two parent groups located on opposite walls of the gallery. Minute variations between individual pairs of portraits counterpoint radical shifts in mood, dress, and expression. Unfittable, inexpressible, the relation of appearance to identity—indeed, the nature of identity itself—is revealed as a fundamental but mutable distinction, intimated in a child's explanatory proposition: this is me, this is you. You the most minimal visual differences are in part the products of temporal dilatations, of durations no longer than what it takes to turn from one image to its counterpart on the wall behind. Highly attuned to such slight shifts, the gaze of the viewer volley back forth, oscillating between making and fixing, looking and remembering, encoun- tering and echoing, present and past. Ultimately, the amount of information disclosed is too great too precise, too specific. Like the other works in this exhibition, This is Me, This is You eludes memory and requires being seen again and again, yet each time, necessarily, it seems different, for the viewer herself will not be—indeed cannot be—the same. That the pathos of implicit loss is encapsulated within the transfixing pleasures of the surface present becomes a muted refrain haunting Horn's work, as it does Wallace Stevens's "Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight" a poem horn cherishes: "Too much as they are to be changed by metaphor, /Too actual, things that in being real /Make any imaginings of them lesser things.'" Later in the same poem, Stevens beautifully articulates how this apprehension may emerge: "Our sense of these things changes and they change, /Not as in metaphor, but in our sense /Of them. So sense exceeds all metaphor.

"This is Me, This is You" eludes memory and requires being seen again and again, yet each time, necessarily, it seems different, for the viewer herself will not be—indeed cannot be—the same. That the pathos of implicit loss is encapsulated within the transfixing pleasures of the surface present becomes a muted refrain haunting Horn's work, as it does Wallace Stevens's "Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight" a poem horn cherishes: "Too much as they are to be changed by metaphor, /Too actual, things that in being real /Make any imaginings of them lesser things.'" However, shifts in the appearance of the subject undergoes: "And yet this effect is a consequence of the way we see; the poet concedes Horn concurs: 'I'm not very involved with the third dimension in the traditional way we define sculpture,' she once declared in an interview. 'I'm more concerned with human consciousness and the way it synthesizes experience.'

Later in the same poem, Stevens beautifully articulates how this apprehension may emerge: "Our sense of these things changes and they change, /Not as in metaphor, but in our sense /Of them. So sense exceeds all metaphor." L.C.

notes
1. The various bodies of work 'overlap naturally,' horn avers. 'The conceptual origins of one work often bleed over into another form. That's why I've never restricted myself to any single idiom . . . . Each form, to me, comments on and enriches the experience of the other.' Roni Horn, 'Inner Geography,' a written interview by Jan Howard, in Roni Horn: Inner Geography (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1994), p. 2.
3. Roni Horn, 'Talking Objects: Interviews with Younger Sculptors' interview by Weade Saunders. Art in America 73, no. 11 (November 1985), p. 120. On a later occasion, she amplified her position: 'I understand all the work to be of a nonabstract nature regardless of the style, form, or explicit subject matter because all the work . . . is connected with experiencing works that are in themselves—and their relationship to the viewer—the ultimate subject and content of the work. I want to equate the experience of the work with its meaning.' (Roni Horn, 'Five Questions: By Way of Introduction' interview by Laurent Bosse, in Roni Horn: Event of Relation (Paris: Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1999), p. 91)