

MEETING OF MINDS

Minimalist architect Michael Gabellini puts five questions to minimalist artist Roni Horn.

My first encounter with Roni Horn's work unfolded in a most circumstantial manner. In spring 1989, I had just completed a Southwestern sojourn that had taken me through the Big Country to experience firsthand the land of the Anasazi. This was accompanied by a supplemental itinerary to scout out several seminal earthworks that had been very formative in my development as a designer: Michael Heizer's *Double Negative*, Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field*, and James Turrell's *Roden Crater*. During the long-awaited sweep through Donald Judd's Marfa, Texas, I found myself standing within a cleared-out, weather-strafed former barracks, gazing at a succession of paired copper forms, each forged and machined to duplicate mechanical identity. The immensity of the landscape I had left seemed to converge and compress itself into a world of miniature. What I had encountered, *For a Here and a There*, from the series "Things That Happen Again," is Roni's meditation on perception: Exploiting the principle of duplication, it uncovers the concept of unity. In my work as an architect, the reductivist tendency to concentrate experience in the act of "placemaking"—a term used by architects and designers meaning the art of designing an environment that is both attractive and useful to people—has compelled me to discover successive projects by Roni. Her books, photographs, and drawings unveil a prescient language of the real that continues to mine the depths of metaphysical and psychological territories. —Michael Gabellini



Michael Gabellini

You have realized several works in architectural environments before. Specifically I am thinking of *You in You*, in Basel, and *Cobbled Leads*, in Munich. Both involve embedding cast material into cobblestoned surfaces of a public street or square. Because these pieces are committed to a specific space, do these commissions differ from your installation work and in the process amplify or alter your sense of placemaking? These pieces function on the level of the vernacular. They are dependent on local circumstance. They integrate more intimately with the site than portable works. *Library of Water* is in this tradition as well.



Roni Horn, *a.k.a.* (detail), 2008–2009. Ink-jet prints on rag paper, 30 paired photographs, 15 x 13 in. each.

In your three-dimensional work, there is a very prescient use of material, from prosaic materials, such as copper, steel, aluminum, lead, rubber, and glass, to a more divergent one, such as gold. Most of these are conceived in their liquid states and are then either forged or cast. What are the specific material qualities that match a given work, and how is a particular material for you a metaphor for intimacy?

Yes, when you talk about originating in the liquid form, I was not specifically aware of this, but it's interesting. I am not aware of any material metaphor for intimacy. I believe the comment you are referring to was describing the glowing light from between the two gold mats as a result of their closeness.

You have mentioned that "a work always comes together twice: first for the artist and second for the viewer." What do you expect of the viewer and how the experience of viewing unfolds?

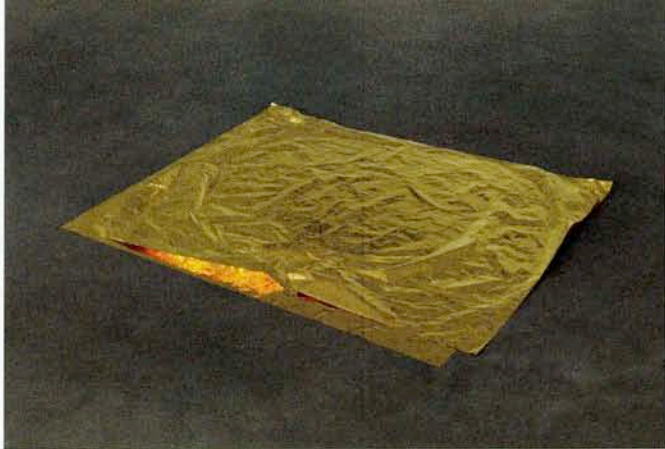
I don't have a list of expectations for the viewer. But a point I have made often in interviews is that the viewer be present. Sounds simple, but in my experience it's rare for a person to be where they are when they are there.

What happens when you move from one form to another when you are using the same source material? Whether you are conceiving a book, a two-dimensional work, or a three-dimensional work, is the material altered from form to form, and does this affect experiencing the work?

The first work that involved pursuing two different forms with the same material was *You Are the Weather*, which became *Haraldsdóttir* as the sixth volume of the work *To Place*. I originally went after this sixth book, and that is

Linda Dresner Boutique, New York. Designed by Michael Gabellini in collaboration with Jay Smith.





Roni Horn, *Paired Gold Mats—for Ross and Felix*, 1994–1995. Two pure gold mats, 1/1,000 x 60 x 49 in. each.

what I was working on when I went to Iceland and spent the summer with my friend Margret [Haraldsdóttir], shooting her portrait while we traveled. As I started to spend time with the material, I realized I had another, different work as well. The content shifted from “face as place” in *Haraldsdóttir* to “the view voyeurizing the viewer” in *You Are the Weather*. In general, going in with one set of assumptions is just an entrance. When you get there, it often opens onto a larger world. . . . It happened with *Pi*, the photographic surround, and with *Arctic Circles*, the seventh book of *To Place*, as well as with *This Is Me, This Is You*, a photographic installation that became a circular book, or a book without end. There are many other examples as well.

Moving laterally, so to speak, through different forms with the same source material happens a lot in my work. Most recently there was *a.k.a.*, a photo installation of 15 paired portraits. It started out as extended endpa-

pers for the two-volume catalogue for the Tate-Whitney touring show. This show, which is a survey-retrospective, if you like, was conceived as a group show of myself. But at that point I wasn't thinking beyond this idea of a graphic device for the set of books I was designing. But once I was able to spend time with it, I realized it was an installation with a different subject—an anonymous portrait that plays with the idea of a collective portrait as well.

There is one aspect of your work that I find so compelling. You have mentioned that in your photographic work, the subject matter of the image is not necessarily the subject matter of the work. The intricate way that the passage of time is revealed on the faces of the older man and woman in *Pi* or the myriad images of the young woman in *You Are the Weather*—in which way do their individual facial qualities or expressions operate as a metaphor for landscape and, by extension, of place?

Yes, in *Pi* I have collected together images that specify the territory without specifying the place. I have generally stayed away from taking descriptive photographs. Famous portraits have a way of doing this—for example, Irving Penn's wonderful portrait of Alfred Hitchcock. I tend to accumulate images that rough in a sense of place or identity while shying away from details. The specifics come in the relationships the images establish among themselves. This demand on the viewer to establish the whole, so to speak, is analogous to the experience of place. ♦

■ Roni Horn's retrospective, “Roni Horn a.k.a. Roni Horn,” is on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Nov. 6–Jan. 24, 2010; and Horn's exhibition at Hauser & Wirth, New York, takes place May 2010. Gabellini Sheppard Associates recently completed a home in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and luxury retail boutiques for Vera Wang and Ports 1961, both in New York.

Roni Horn, installation view of *You Are the Weather*, 1994–96, Tate Modern, London, 2009. 64 C-prints and 36 gelatin silver prints, 8¼ x 10¼ in. each.

