

Antonia Hirsch, Negative Space, Toronto, Gallery TPW

Alex Bowron

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Antonia Hirsch

Exhibition views, *Negative Space*,
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Photos: Toni Hafkenscheid

Antonia Hirsch *Negative Space*

Negative Space is a solo exhibition comprised of six aesthetically cohesive and visually powerful works by Berlin-based Canadian artist Antonia Hirsch. Originally shown at SFU Galleries in Vancouver, the works—including a five-hour durational performance and a text work for a mobile device—share a deep connection to the silence and mystery of both our inner and outer worlds. Throughout the exhibition, Hirsch finds numerous ways to question the human relationship to illusion, surface, and image. Functioning as a unit, two geometric sculptures, one spherically framed archival inkjet print, and one elongated HD video installation, appear as formal rearrangements of physical darkness. With their mostly black geometry, repeated astronomical motifs, and strategic use of light, each piece appears undeniably connected to the others and inexplicably capable of rendering space physical. *Negative Space* is dark and quiet. Like outer space, the works seem to absorb sound and emit energy, as though they might actually be capable of converting one into the other.

Positioned at the entrance to the exhibition, the three-part black steel frame of *Narcissus Screen* does well to evaluate the physicality of empty space. Using a sheet of perfectly transparent glass to occupy one of the work's three frames, Hirsch cultivates the illusion of another such surface within the two empty frames. In a similar play on the real, *433 Eros* presents a NASA image of an asteroid in outer space that could easily be mistaken for a dramatically-lit image of a common potato (a possibility reinforced by the title of another work in the exhibition: *Cosmic Night Shade*). The asteroid image is mounted on a surface reminiscent of the convex sphere of an eighteenth-century black mirror, a reference that parallels our current obsession with filtering reality through a digital lens. Hirsch continues this train of thought in *Solaris Panel*, a steel framed tiling of ninety satin

black surfaces representing the various models of our current personal communication devices. In *Solaris Panel*, Hirsch successfully nods towards the embodied power and complicated relationship with surface that our devices possess. These all-too-familiar objects are demoted from the digital dimension to one of pure physicality. And yet, despite this turnaround, an undeniable sensuality remains, complete with all its mysterious connections to infinity.

In *Negative Space*, Hirsch examines the boundary between the concrete and the representational. Despite their recognizable forms and ready-made construction, the works in this exhibition maintain an ambiguity of content that both denies and reaffirms what is real. Our tendency to favour the image over the real might be explained by the human desire for order and understanding. When we view reality through an image we are afforded the opportunity to sustain our gaze and uncover details that can lead us to a clearer connection to the thing being viewed. In a sense, the image can be understood as a representation of reality that has the potential to *become physical*. Illusion, therefore, is utilized as an entry point into the real that has the potential to nurture a more complex and nuanced definition of our world.

Alex Bowron

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