

Hamer, Katy Diamond. "Rebecca Horn, The Vertebrae Oracle," *Flash Art*, June 6, 2014.

Flash Art

Rebecca Horn, The Vertebrae Oracle

Rebecca Horn (1944-Present) first garnered attention within the realm of the art world in the late 1960s through early 1970s. At the time, she used her body and sometimes the bodies of others, to make a statement on sculpture, drawing, painting and performance. The body and the physicality of the work is at it's core. Her most recent solo exhibition, on view at Sean Kelly Gallery in New York, proves to be an evolution of her practice and transformation of the physical self. Now in her 70th year, the variants in the definition of the corporeal experience in her work is still ever present and human scale. Yet the earlier projects seem to be conceptually larger than the work at present. Very reference to her own legacy, for *The Vertebrae Oracle*, several framed drawings and some free-standing, mechanized sculptures are on view. All of her work is based on text which is written before the artwork itself is made and this exhibition follows this pre-determined format. A poem, with the same title, was written in 2013 for artist and mentor Méret Oppenheim (1913-1985) on what would have been her 100th birthday. Oppenheim and Horn were friends but the older artist often also played the role of mentor for Horn during their time spent together. The poem is reflected in the work and the work, is in the poem. In commencing with text, the artist gives the power of visualization, even for a brief moment, to the reader. She uses the text as a catalyst, rather than didactic narrative in order to make choices.



Rebecca Horn, *Revelation of a Tree*, 2014. Courtesy of Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, 2014

The *Vertebrae Oracle* for Meret Oppenheim
 In the fear-love
 circling
 pulsing
 bird-proud androgynous
 Justine in tiger pelt
 the liver spots turquoise
 flitting about in the swarm the Queen of Bees
 bathed in honey wine

her stony roofless hideaway protected by the Pleiades
the souls confusing play swinging
on the goatee of the uncle forgotten the Hebrew
the journey to Corfu to the climbing huts. (Rebecca Horn, 2013)

In the current exhibition, the body plays a role as it did in her earlier work, but the current position, rather than be an obvious plausible presence or photographic representation, lies in the subtlety of the marks on paper, the height of the sculptures and in some cases, the width, all of which correspond with the artist's own height and the expansiveness between her outstretched arms. The human, or rather organic aura, lies in the gritty hardened volcanic stones perched on branches. Some of the sculptures such as *Der Feuerfall*, 2013 are constructed with found branches from the surrounding forrest of the artist's property at The Moon Tower Foundation in Bad König, Germany. Cast in bronze and carrying an invisible weight, *Revelation of a Tree*, 2014, sits on a low pedestal, the only work that functions as a trompe l'oeil, feigning to be what it demonstrates.

Familiar tropes are present, yet where they were once sharpened pencils, "Pencil Mask" (1972), they now transpire as extended pointed shapes, without an obvious function beyond that of which they have been assigned. Such as in another detail from *Revelation of a Tree*, 2014, slowly opening and closing, a self referential venus fly trap that channels the past but only in order to arrive at the present.



Rebecca Horn, *Revelation of a Tree*, 2014. Courtesy of Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, 2014

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Much of Rebecca Horn's artwork comes from a way of conveying energy, mortal and mystical and finding where it coexists with the energy of nature. Her trajectory is somewhat parallel to that of the artists who founded Arte Povera. While not officially assigned to this genre, a similar conceptual aesthetic exists. In an almost entirely male movement -Marisa Merz is really the only well-known female artist to have emerged under this label- Horn is comfortable aligning her work within this artistic lineage. Saying "Jannis Kounellis is one of my oldest friends. In 1972 we were both included in dOCUMENTA (5) for the first

time." Rebecca Horn has been included in dOCUMENTA . Continuing, "As part of The Moon Tower Foundation, I exchange work with artists. Jannis -whom she affectionately refers to as Johnny- wanted a work of mine and he made a fantastic piece in the museum for me. Next we are going to do something with [Giuseppe] Penone. I was a bit younger than most of them -the artists who were then working and categorized with starting Arte Povera- and Kounellis and I met while I was still a student in Hamburg. He made *Da inventare sul posto* (*To invent on the spot*), a painting with music notes, a violinist and a ballerina performing and I made *Einhorn'* (*'Unicorn'*)." The latter is Horn's most well-known work of a woman with a large, white unicorn horn strapped to her head, walking through a field. Their artistic musings were of a similar vein encapsulating the body, movement and instruction.

From the display caption on Finger Gloves, 1972 from www.tate.org:

Ideas of touch and sensory awareness are explored in this work. Horn has described how wearing these gloves altered her relationship with her surroundings, so that distant objects came within her reach: 'the finger gloves are light. I can move them without any effort. Feel, touch, grasp anything, but keeping a certain distance from the objects. The lever-action of the lengthened fingers intensifies the various sense-data of the hand; ...I feel me touching, I see me grasping, I control the distance between me and the objects.' Implicit in the work is the idea that touching makes possible an intimacy between our own body and those of others.

Times have changed but methodologies of art-making have remained. The oeuvre of 2014 may not appear similar to that of 1972, but the artist fingerprint is the same...you may just have to squint to notice.



Rebecca Horn, Moon in the Vertebrae Oracle, 2014, 2014. Courtesy of Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, 2014

Rebecca Horn, *The Vertebrae Oracle* is on view at Sean Kelly Gallery from May 10th through June 21st, 2014.