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TENSIONS

Elizabeth Turk's new exhibition at Hirschl & Adler Modern in New York City explores various experiences of our relationship to nature. **BY JOHN O'HERN**



Elizabeth Turk expresses the fluidity of thought in marble. Solid form and negative space intertwine to make real the idea that “space” is not “empty.” Hers is a world of paradox. “It is my nature that when I think of an idea I also think of an opposite statement,” says Turk. “It’s a simultaneous truth. As you move closer to the border of a thought, suddenly another reality is staring at you. It’s about human nature. In one space we dominate and in another we’re dominated.” She also contemplates the artificial distance humans have created between themselves and all that is “other.”

Her exhibition *Tensions*, at Hirschl & Adler Modern in New York City, continues through October 24. Shelley Farmer, director of the gallery, writes, “Turk encourages us to consider how nature has shaped these materials long before the artist’s manipulation of them into new forms. When viewed as components in a complex natural system, their singular beauty and inherent mystery is revealed. This body of work is less about individual sculptures standing alone, and more about the sum of their parts. Turk compels us to view works of art not only as objects to be coveted and collected, but also as expressions of the natural world and our evolving relation to it.”

“The title *Tensions* may be awkward,” Turk admits. “I think of tension as a boundary between things—a place of change. There’s a boundary between our human temperament and the world we live in. It’s about our inability to express that we’re an element in a larger scheme of things. It’s in that space between where we feel anxiety...tension.”

“On a grander scale, it flows into the conceptual architecture of the show,” she continues. “We all want to create our dream house or our garden. We have to live on this precarious planet.”

The exhibition’s architecture leads the viewer through various experiences of our relationship to nature. In the first are small sculptures, *Marble & Baja Beach Stone*, 2015, that began with her picking up beach stones and simply holding them. “I love to pick up stones in a reflective space and sort of ponder,” she muses. “Many others do too. It’s a quietly intuitive thing to do, and it’s sort of a physical act like the feeling of worry

1
Marble & Baja Beach Stone 13, marble and Baja beach stones, 11½ x 18 x 10”

2
Elizabeth Turk in her studio with *Earth & Universe – Marble & Baja Beach Stone*.



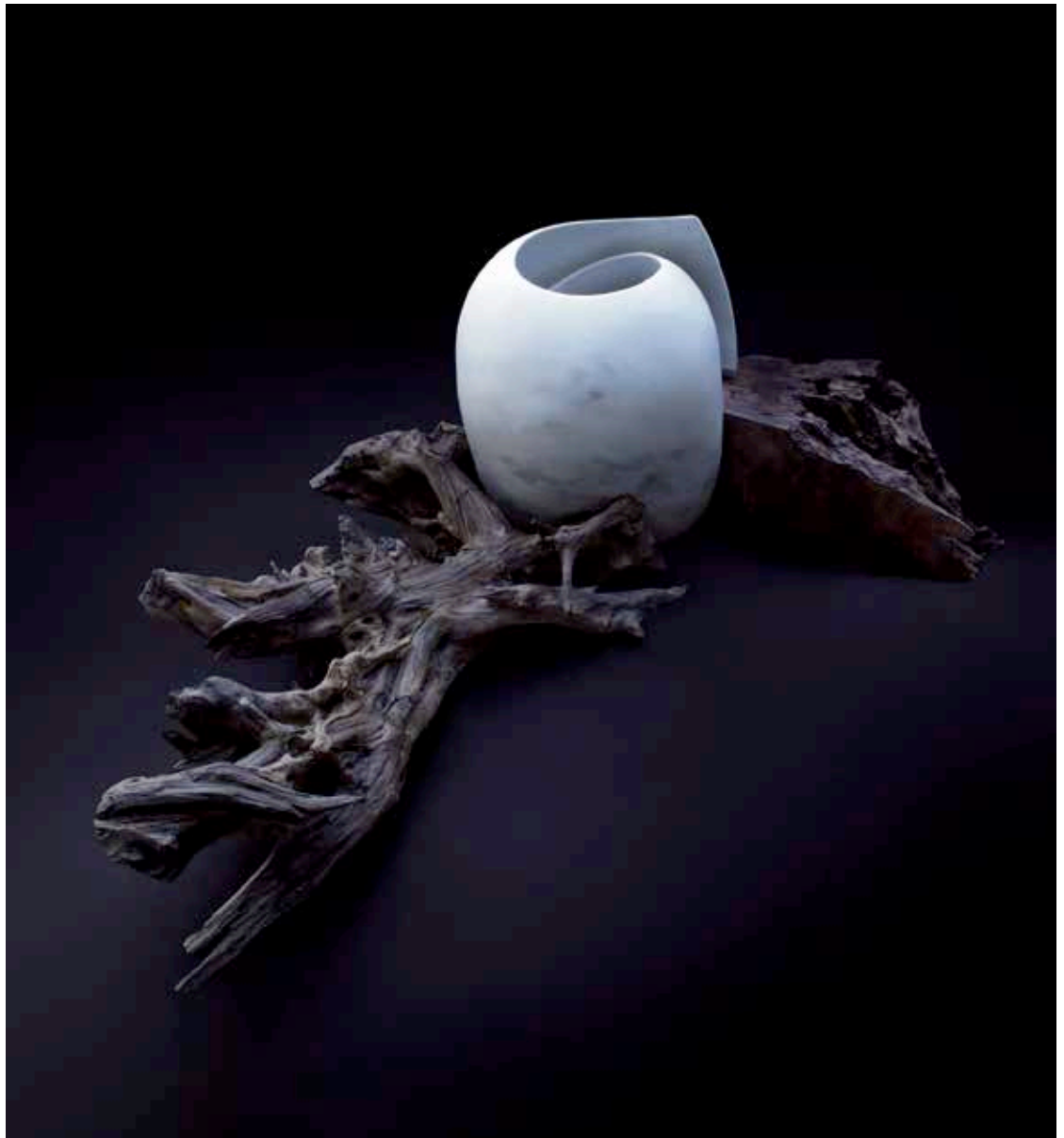
3
Home, marble and
Northern California
redwood, 36 x 67 x 120"

4
*Marble & Idaho Green
Quartzite 4*, marble
and Idaho green
quartzite with plinth,
5½ x 17 x 22"

5
*Marble & Idaho Green
Quartzite 2*, marble
and Idaho green
quartzite with plinth,
5½ x 17 x 41½"

6
*Marble & Baja Beach
Stone 12*, marble and
Baja beach stones,
10 x 11 x 18"

All images courtesy
the artist and Hirschl &
Adler Modern, New
York. All photographs
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beads. It's always a portal for meditative time and reflection." Turk allows herself to be reflective, but also delves into the tangible reality of the stones and how they were formed.

"I had the Baja stones around the studio when I was doing the *Cage* series where I was working with the line defining three-dimensional space, and with positive and negative space," she explains. "I was thinking of how the quartz found the cracks in the stone and filled them so you have in your hand this solid object that will live as it is after you're long gone. I started to think of the history of empty spaces and the possibilities of what was going on there.

I originally thought of carving away all the black stuff to reveal the beautiful white pathway, the movement that was captured in the stone."

The sinuous carved marble echoes the fluidity of the forming quartz.

The second area of the exhibition contains two large pieces, *Home* and *Evaporated River*, both from 2015, creating an environment she describes as calm and thoughtful. *Home* is a curved vessel of marble nestled among the roots of a Northern California redwood. Overall it measures 10 by 3 feet.

In the last section there are four sculptures in the *Marble & Idaho Green Quartzite* series from 2013. The color of

the green quartzite captivated her. The first in the series is an example of her experimenting with how far she can push her materials. In *Marble & Idaho Green Quartzite 1*, the thin ribbon becomes a thicker clamp in the shape of a "C," gripping the green stone. In the second piece of the series the ribbon slumps languidly, seemingly of its own weight, across the green quartzite.

As she disappears into her protective gear to begin the reduction of the block of marble, she enters a world inside her head where she ponders such universal questions as "Why am I here?" and "Why do humans think and do as they do?" She wonders, "Why do these soft, fleshy creatures choose to design hard boxes to find comfort in? Why didn't we choose the spiral for our sense of order?" She ponders the disconnect or the distance between scientists and the things they study, between each of us and our environment. When she emerges, she has created paradoxical works in stone that can be catalysts for the same thoughts in the people who look at them.

Above all, she encourages us to "live a life of curiosity." ●



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ELIZABETH TURK: TENSIONS

When: Through October 24, 2015

Where: Hirschl & Adler Modern,
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New York, NY 10019

Information: (212) 535-8810,
www.hirschlandadler.com