

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Lynda Benglis

Private view: Thursday 2 March, 6–8pm

Exhibition dates: 3 March–29 April 2023

Thomas Dane Gallery
3 Duke Street, St James's, London SW1

[Looking at the work] we experience something in our bodies that is proprioceptive; we experience it in our whole body – you feel what you see and you are 'charged'. It's an exchange of energy.

Lynda Benglis

Throughout her career spanning more than 50 years, Lynda Benglis (b. 1941, Lake Charles, Louisiana) has had an incomparable ability to connect places, people, sensations, memories and emotions with her revolutionary approach to material. Brought together at Thomas Dane Gallery, and seen in London for the first time, the combination of works in this exhibition articulate Benglis' fascination with using 'things' in ways that they are not typically used – fragile materials to express solidity and solid materials to express fragility.

Sitting directly on the floor of the gallery, Benglis' new bronze sculptures might be mistaken for relics from another world, preserved in time. The frozen gestures of knots, bows, twists and jagged edges reflect distortions of the surrounding space and whomever may be in it. These hyper-polished, outlandish works metamorphosed from clay sculptures – referred to as 'Elephant Necklaces' – using digital innovations to cast the ceramic forms and enlarge them in bronze to the point of disorientation in the extreme. Having worked with ceramics since the 1990s, Benglis has described her process as a dance, feeling the need to wrestle with the material, immersing herself completely within shape and process. As soon as the onlooker has caught up to the rhythm of such a dance, Benglis typically side steps any semblance of repetition and moves on to the next series. As such, these new bronze sculptures always exist in a space of contradiction: *Elephant: First Foot Forward* (2018), *Power Tower* (2019), and *Black Widow* (2021) all stand steadfast, much like untouchable public monuments, while still bearing a fragility and mortality in the undeniable presence of the artist's hand – a twisted and wrestled memory of Benglis' sensual dance.

Cast in vibrant pink, green and yellow polyurethane, Benglis' egg-like wall sculptures (made in 2017) take on an incandescent nature, seemingly ephemeral, and appearing to float, especially in relation to the grounded bronze sculptures. Thought to have been amongst the first representations in ancient Mediterranean iconography, it is easy to connect the image of the egg to the concepts of spring, fertility and pregnancy. Even the famous Mardi Gras parades of Benglis' native Louisiana find their origins in the honouring of new life: a celebration rooted in the Epiphany, when the new-born Jesus is visited by the three kings. Sharing their names with such ancient Greek goddesses as *Peitho* or *Thetis*, these luminescent, elemental works perpetuate Benglis' contrarian and untraditional approach to materiality, liquidating the boundaries of painting and sculpture by famously placing the former on the floor, and the latter on the walls.

Much like the artist herself, Benglis' works exist as a consequence of their surroundings: whether it is the tussling and grappling of clay in the desert in Santa Fe; the dripping and painting in latex to form floor 'pours' during her early days in New York City; the ornate adornment of paper wall sculptures and the famed 1970s sparkle knots with glitter, evoking her early memories of Mardi Gras in New Orleans; or the homage to the relics of ancient Greek mythology, encountered whilst diving on 'her' island of Kastellorizo. It is evident that Benglis approaches the physical making of her work in the way she describes herself: proprioceptively. Also known as kinaesthesia, proprioception is often referred to as the 'sixth sense', allowing for both conscious and unconscious awareness of the body through sensations.

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Since the 1960s, Lynda Benglis has been celebrated for her free, ecstatic forms that are simultaneously playful and visceral, organic and abstract. Benglis began her career in the midst of Postminimal art, pushing the traditions of painting and sculpture into new territories. Her work—comprised of a variety of materials, from beeswax, latex, and polyurethane foam to later innovations with plaster, gold, vaporized metals, glass, ceramics, and paper—demonstrates a continued fascination with process. The embrace of flowing forms, colour, and sensual surfaces plays a large part in her continuous investigation of sensory experience.

Selected institutional solo exhibitions include: *Lynda Benglis*, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas TX (2022); *Lynda Benglis*, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. (2021); *In the Realm of the Senses*, Museum of Cycladic Art, presented by NEON, Athens, Greece (2019); *Lynda Benglis: Face Off*, Kistefos-Museet, Jevnaker, Norway (2018); *Lynda Benglis: Secrets*, Bergen Assembly, KODE Art Museums of Bergen, Norway (2016); *Lynda Benglis*, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen CO (2016); *Lynda Benglis: Water Sources*, Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York NY (2015); *Lynda Benglis*, The Hepworth Wakefield, West Yorkshire, England (2015); and *Lynda Benglis: Figures*, The SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah GA (2012), among many others.

Selected public collections include: Tate, London; Dallas Museum of Art TX; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago IL; Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles CA; The Museum of Modern Art, New York NY; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York NY; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, among many others.

Benglis is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and two National Endowment for the Arts grants, among other commendations.

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Gallery hours: Tuesday to Friday 11am-6pm, Saturday 12pm-6pm or by appointment.

Admission: Free

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Nearest Tube: Green Park or Piccadilly Circus

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