

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Louisa Buck, "Lynda Benglis: Breaking boundaries," *Telegraph*, 3rd April 2015



A sense of wanderlust and inventive experimentation come to the fore in American artist Lynda Benglis's first UK solo exhibition

Lynda Benglis achieved early and lasting notoriety when she appeared in the November 1974 edition of *Artforum* magazine wearing nothing but a pair of cat's eye sunglasses and brandishing a cartoonishly large dildo from between her legs. The effect was seismic: two of the magazine's editors resigned and the two page ad has since become one of the iconic images of feminist art history.

Today the 73-year-old Benglis may be less overtly confrontational, but as her current survey at The Hepworth Wakefield amply confirms, in both her bodily concerns and her exploration of an extraordinary range of materials, the Louisiana-born artist continues to challenge the boundaries of artistic acceptability.



Lynda Benglis, Zanzidae: Peacock Series, 1979 Wire mesh, enamel, glass and plastic

11 DUKE STREET, ST JAMES'S, LONDON SW1Y 6BN

TEL +44 (0)20 7925 2505 FAX +44 (0)20 7925 2506 info@thomasdane.com

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

In what is, astonishingly, Benglis's first solo exhibition in a UK public institution, the energy is palpable as more than 50 works spanning nearly half a century pour across floors, ooze from corners and fan, shimmy and dangle across walls. Whether she is using lead, latex or lurex; ceramic, copper or chicken wire – and every conceivable material in between, including bronze, gold leaf, photography and film – this is an artist who fully lives up to her claim that “I need to stay on the move”.

“I'm curious about a material and then I find what it can do,” she says. “I ask what the specifications of that particular material are and I push it to its limits. I've always done that, always, otherwise I know nothing!”

Benglis's first “Pour paintings” of 1968 pooled brightly coloured rubber latex directly onto the ground, in response to the colour field painting of her friend Barnett Newman, the hard-edged industrial minimalism of Carl Andre's floorbound bricks and tiles and also giving a wry backwards look at the earlier (and much publicised) ejaculatory splatterings of Jackson Pollock. “I wasn't breaking away from painting,” she remembers, “I was trying to redefine what it was”.



Artist Lynda Benglis pictured with her work Scarab, 1990

Since then, while Benglis's inventiveness has continued to run riot and the range of her materials has proliferated, a love of natural forms and fluid flows has remained a constant in her work. She credits her childhood growing up in Lake Charles Louisiana as playing a key role in shaping her sensibilities. “I had my own boat and I knew all the waterways, the back waterways and the bayous and the lakes around my town – we'd go for miles. We swam with the water moccasins and turtles and the alligator gars and we were just fine with that, with all these eyes looking at us.”

The innate restlessness that propelled her through the bayous of Louisiana still runs through both Benglis's life and her work. “I like to wake up not knowing where I am,” she has stated; another important influence on her multifarious sculptures has been her very different homes dotted around the globe. Since the late Seventies she has lived and worked between the Northwest Woods of East Hampton, an ancestral

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

family house on the Greek island of Kastelorizo, in Ahmedabad in Western India, and the Bowery in New York City.

In 1995 she added an adobe studio in Santa Fe to this impressive array of bases. “I don't think I would have been able to exist always just living in New York,” she says. “There are some artists that make their world within the context of the studio but I really have to experience it, I have to be in there.”



Lynda Benglis Proto Knot, 1971 Wire mesh, cotton bunting, plaster, gesso and sparkles

So how does Benglis feel about the *Artforum*ad for which she is still best known (and which can also be seen at The Hepworth)? “I wish I had that body now!” she laughs. “I knew it would be big, in my gut I knew that, but I had to do it and I knew it would be challenging. It was important for me to present the sexuality of both a man and a woman together symbolically.” But as to why it has reverberated for over four decades she has no easy answer.

“There must be something basic in that so far it is still provocative, but I don't know, I think different generations feel differently. And because I can't answer that, I just throw it out there because I realise I can't protect myself from something that was me, that I felt that way at the time.” However within the context of this rich and dynamic show, this early provocation seems at last to have found its rightful place as just one significant work amongst many.

Lynda Benglis is at The Hepworth Wakefield until July 1

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/luxury/art/66384/lynda-benglis-breaking-boundaries.html>