

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Thawley, Dan. 'Interview with India Menuez and Lynda Benglis'. *Vogue Italia* Online. 12 October 2017

VOGUE ITALIA

Interview with India Menuez and Lynda Benglis



It was a Friday afternoon mid-fashion week, but within the calm surrounds of Lynda Benglis' airy Prince Street loft, that chaos couldn't have felt further away. Beneath one of the 76-year-old sculptor's globular polyurethane wall pieces, the performance artist India Menuez, 24, sat on the floor stroking the elf-like ears of Benglis' dopey dachshund, Pie. The French photographer Maripol hovered over her Polaroid selects at a table nearby, minutes after photographing the other two women, 52 years apart in age, in the surrounding streets, during which fellow American artist Joan Jonas passed by for a chat. It was a serendipitous encounter, and a rare insight into another period of downtown NYC's artistic past.

Prompted by *Vogue Italia* to choose an inspiring woman from another generation, Menuez took no time in picking Benglis, an integral player in the American Minimalist movement in the 1960s whose career has spanned many disciplines from poured and crushed sculptures to autoportrait video works and that infamous ArtForum nude advertisement. Both artists have experimented with representation of the human body in their work, and physically they make for a striking duo: Menuez' with her porcelain skin, aqualine nose and strawberry blonde waves; Benglis

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even more petite, with piercing, friendly eyes and a tumble of swept-back grey. Their mutual appreciation is evident from start to finish.

Dan Thawley: Though you two have never met, I understand you have a mutual friend?

India Menuez: Yes! We have just been talking about Jackie Matisse and her work.

Lynda Benglis: She is another red-haired lady, and an artist, and she was in India and made kites with her own hair. I think of Jackie because, first of all, she's from a very famous family, the Matisse family, yet she also made something of herself in a delightfully perverse way. The idea of flying kites is so heroic – like the marriage of her genes with the idea of flying. She's totally poetic in her language and her being.

DT: That's special. India's work is often about the human body too.

IM: But sometimes it feels like such a difficult question to answer 'what I do' because as a job it feels like my job is to be an actor, and that's what I get paid to do, more so. I recently acted in this Amazon show called "I Love Dick" based on Chris Kraus's novel. It's the biggest TV role I've ever had.

LB: Well you're crossing the boundaries in your art and I have always believed in that myself. I've been involved with video and television and dancers too. I think that you should try everything! Once I remember inviting Joan Jonas to the 14th street Y to do a performance and that was her first ever performance. She actually walked around nude holding a mirror in front of her that was her same height and width.

DT: That would have been so daring then! With such breakthrough works 40 or 50 years ago, how do you think gender remains present in the art world today?

IM: A friend of mine was working at like an art fair and told me that when collectors are looking at work from a new artist they always ask to see a photo of the artist if it's a woman. They never ask to see the photo if it's a man!

LB: Women, again the object of the gaze. I've often considered that as something to mock, especially when I was studying the idea of the pin-up. When I did my first Polaroids I asked a lot of young male friends to pose with me wearing various wigs and things in the Bettie Paige position.

IM: I love getting to talk to people of all different generations about how they navigate the different spectrums of sexuality and gender and how the two intersect. My generation is obsessed with trying to name these things that I think have already been a part of the conversation for a long time. For me, I present as a woman and experience my life as a woman in all these ways but I don't entirely believe in that as a container for every part of me.

LB: Well me either. Well I mean that's biology, we know that. It's a stylistic freedom that we have now. We cross gender, we cross ideas, we pollinate, so to speak.

Vogue Italia, October 2017, n.806, pag.107

<http://www.vogue.it/en/news/vogue-arts/2017/10/12/interview-with-india-menuenz-and-lynda-benglis-vogue-italia-october-2017/>