

Lynda Benglis: Early Work 1967–1979

October 8–December 3, 2020

Ortuzar Projects and Cheim & Read are pleased to present *Lynda Benglis: Early Work 1967–1979*. Across three spaces in uptown and downtown Manhattan, this major exhibition includes significant work from the artist's first decade in the city that proved crucial to the development of her practice. Sparkle and metallized knot sculptures, including the multi-part installation *North, South, East, West*, 1976 – last shown in New York at a 1981 Whitney Museum exhibition – are on view at Ortuzar Projects on White Street in Tribeca. Lozenge-shaped wax paintings are juxtaposed with the colorful latex and polyurethane pours for which Benglis became known at Cheim & Read on East 67th Street. One floor above, at the Ortuzar viewing room, is a selection of gilded wall sculptures inspired by the caryatids from the porch of the Erechtheion at the Acropolis in Athens. Together, these key bodies of work bear out Benglis's formidable influence on contemporary sculpture. Her radical experiments with materials, engendered in style and form, must be reconsidered today as not only provocative but thoroughly transformative.

For more than fifty years, Benglis has been at the forefront of post-Minimalist invention alongside peers Louise Bourgeois, Richard Serra, Eva Hesse, and Bruce Nauman. Her highly liquid process often yields beautiful yet shocking results which, as art historian and critic Julia Bryan-Wilson writes, refuse “to be constrained by conventional codes around the ostensibly discrete genres of painting and sculpture.” This joint exhibition marks the first survey of Benglis's early work in New York since her mid-career retrospective (2009–11), which traveled to the New Museum.

Benglis developed knot sculptures in the early 1970s. Each begins from a tube of wire screen, cotton bunting, and gesso that is looped around itself and tied; actions which register a bodily gesture, coded in a precise configuration. The long sculptural limbs also reference the figure, while their interlacing creates a distinct interior and exterior, and often, a recognizable knob-like form.

Sparkle knots – including *Eta*, 1972 – are superficially treated with glitter and acrylic paint, invoking the flamboyant effect of masquerade. The series was the subject of a solo show at The Clocktower in New York (1973–74), where they were lit by a string of flashing colored lights. Benglis later began to finish her knot sculptures in aerosolized metals including zinc, tin, steel, and copper. This technique playfully fused organic form and industrial processes in direct opposition to the hard-edged objects of minimalism.

Benglis named some knots after the U.S. military phonetic alphabet – *Alpha I*, 1973–74, *Bravo*, 1973–74, *Charlie*, 1973 – and others after letters in the Greek alphabet, which a few also visually recall. With four components seemingly designated for the cardinal directions, *North, South, East, West*, 1976 explodes ecstatically across the wall in a choreographic phrase liberated from the grid.

Also on view is *Untitled (Totem)*, 1972, a slender sculpture with a glittered surface that stretches over eight feet. Made in a similar process, although preceding the knots, its rigid form was never twisted. Shown alongside collected ephemera from the era is *Smile*, 1974, a bronze cast of the

double-headed dildo that Benglis brandished in her *Artforum* ad that year, notoriously defying conventions of gender, propriety and genre.

Lynda Benglis (b.1941, Lake Charles, Louisiana) lives and works in New York, New York and Santa Fe, New Mexico. Her work is the subject of forthcoming exhibitions at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (2020–21) and the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas (2021). Recent solo presentations include *Lynda Benglis: In the Realm of the Senses*, Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens, presented by NEON (2019–20); *Face Off*, Kistefos-Museet, Jevnaker (2018); *Lynda Benglis*, The Hepworth Wakefield, Yorkshire (2015); and *Lynda Benglis*, Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Le Consortium, Dijon, RISD Museum, Providence, the New Museum, New York, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2009–11). She is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and two National Endowment for the Arts grants, among others. Her work is in the permanent collections of public institutions including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the Art Institute of Chicago; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; and Tate, London. This exhibition is her eleventh with Cheim & Read, and her first with Ortuzar Projects.

Ortuzar Projects, 9 White Street, New York, New York 10013
Cheim & Read, 23 East 67th Street, 2nd Floor, New York, New York 10065
Ortuzar Viewing Room, 23 East 67th Street, 3rd Floor, New York, New York 10065