

PEDER LUND

Liz Larner: New Works

16 September - 31 October 2020

Beginning Wednesday, September 16th, Peder Lund will present five new ceramic wall works by the American installation artist and sculptor Liz Larner (1960-). Since the 1980s, Larner has explored and expanded the possibilities of sculpture by combining geometric formalism with notions of movement and change. Her use of line, color, and shape work to modify and reinvent the formal language of Minimalism, producing new relationships between viewer, sculpture, and the surrounding environment. An inventor of new forms, Larner's sculptures are not easy to categorize. Larner's work evokes an exquisite tension through the use of unconventional materials, the manipulation of space, the presence of unexpected color, and the destabilization of monumentality and volume. This is the artist's first solo exhibition in Norway.



Working with both analog and digital tools, Larner's materials change from work to work and can include fiberglass, crystals, paper, clay, aluminum, steel, rubber, epoxy, mirror, cloth, as well as champagne, caviar, sour cream, and even bacteria, as in her early work where Larner examined issues of transformation and decay in a series of petri dish cultures which she also documented through photography. Indeed an important example from Larner's oeuvre, 1987's *Used to Do the Job*, owned by The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, appears at first to be a sculpture adhering to a Minimalist tradition: one wax cube sits atop of a sheet metal cube of roughly the same size. It is only upon a careful reading of the work's label that it is revealed that the wax cube contains all of the ingredients that comprise a bomb - a makeup that has now made the work all but impossible to transport. Although in all practicalities, the work would not and cannot explode, there lies within it a powerful tension and subtle threat to any institution which houses the work.

In her work, *Bird in Space* from 1989, which was acquired by the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Larner wove two curving planes of fibers that define the space around them in different ways, depending on where the viewer stands. The tensile structure has no real weight or solid mass, however, a constant friction is maintained between the object and the space of presentation. The force of the object is such that if the tension of the fibers is too strong, it is possible to rip out and destroy that part of the building, while if the tension is too loose, the lines of the piece would droop causing a complete loss of buoyancy to the work. There is a perfect, tentative balance that must be achieved between what will hold the ropes

tightly and what the institutional structure can handle to maintain that tension. A similar investigation into such tensions was explored by the artist in her work *Chained Perspective: Reversed, Reflected*, 1992 which was installed on the occasion of her survey exhibition in 2006 at Kunsthaus Graz.



Larner began including ceramic sculpture in her artistic practice in the late 1990s. During these early years, Larner was able to audit classes taught by Ken Price (1935-2012), a revered Los Angeles sculptor whom Larner had long-admired. Through his tutelage, Larner was able to explore slab building, glazing, firing, and the history of ceramics. Fascinated by the autonomy of this ancient medium, Larner experimented with various compositions and forms, pushing the limits of the material. In her work, Larner exploits the process of firing and glazing which, through each step, harbors a moment of unpredictability and chance that is significant for the final object. As Larner has remarked, “As I worked with different clays and ceramics more of the extreme malleability and ubiquity of it sunk in along with the sense that it comes from underground. It is such an old material and *métier*, it has so much history, but for me, it seems still wide open and very emotionally resonant in its more unperfected states.”



Ceramics have perhaps offered Larner the most consistent and fecund area of investigation in her oeuvre, although may seem a surprising choice for an artist who began by studying photography at Cal Arts in the 1980s, a milieu where faculty and students were more interested in a conceptual approach to art than material exploration or craftsmanship. It was in Southern California in the mid-century, however, where Peter Voulkos (1924-2002) and the Otis Group completely redefined American ceramics and brought them into the realm of modern sculpture. Larner is well aware of this tradition, and while her

peripatetic exploration of sculptural form has often been driven by the properties of a chosen material, it is perhaps equally compelled by an interest in process and transience.



For her solo exhibition at the Aspen Art Museum in 2016, Larner presented painted ceramic wall works inside the institution alongside *X* (2013), a mirror-polished stainless steel sculpture installed outdoors. The form is one that the artist has explored numerous times, showing versions at institutions including the Walker Art Museum, the Nasher Sculpture Center, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the University of Texas, Austin. The original form of *X* was entirely computer-generated, with the artist exploring the poetic potential of empty spaces through preparatory drawings and models.

Presented at Peder Lund are Larner's wall-based ceramic forms that support richly chromatic surfaces and incorporate a combination of materials and pigmentation. Their surfaces are uneven – breaks, fissures, cracks, and bends bisect them vertically—reminiscent of the earth's shifting crust. The unique imperfections intrinsic to these works are derived from an earlier ceramic piece Larner made in 2012 called *Octan*. The artist had hoped the work would come out of the kiln clean and even, but it, unfortunately, broke in the process. The fragmented piece featured cracks on its surface, and although not initially the desired effect, it was something which Larner embraced and began to explore further. By this chance occurrence, this mishap allowed her to employ a more experimental and unpredictable process.

The works featured in the exhibition, created exclusively for Peder Lund, are the most recent examples of an ongoing series that considers the poetic qualities of geological formations. They hover away from the wall, confusing the viewer's sense of spatial expectations, with highly detailed and colorful surfaces achieved through the application of epoxy mixed with pigment and forms which are vaguely reminiscent of ancient clay tablets. Environmental factors implicit in the construction of the pieces determine their final material states and are physically rendered in the work, resulting in imperfections along their textured expanses. The viewer is given the sense of a celestial being, looking down below on rivers, lakes, foothills, tundras, and geometric interventions.

Larner's ceramic works in this exhibition evoke associations with the natural world and the body, both in her use of material as well as through the titles she gives such as *Blackbird (inflexion)*, *Striae*, and *Open handed*. There is a poetic blending of the uncanny, as well, with the work *Liken*, the only sculpture that is an incomplete oval form. A powerful multiplicity is achieved with the synthesis of these objects' forms and titles. The resulting pieces hover in front of the wall, managing to be simultaneously painterly and sculptural. Larner's work is often described as "telluric"; her ceramic works both address



the body and earth that the materials come from. Their titles typically allude to fragmentation and changes in state. Through these works both the body and nature are represented, quietly accepting that time causes change.

Liz Larner (b. 1960) received her BFA from the California Institute of the Arts in 1985. She lives and works in Los Angeles. Larner's work will be the subject of a solo museum exhibition at Sculpture Center, Long Island City in 2021, which will travel to The Contemporary Austin and the Walker Art Center. A solo presentation of her work will be held at the Kunsthalle Zürich in 2021, as well. She was featured in *The Foundation of the Museum: MOCA's Collection*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2019 – 2020). Selected solo museum exhibitions include Aspen Art Museum (2016); Art Institute of Chicago (2015); *Two or Three or Something: Maria Lassnig, Liz Larner*, Kunsthhaus Graz, (2006); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2001-02); MAK, Austrian Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna (1998); and Kunsthalle Basel (1997). She has been included twice in the Whitney Biennial (2006, 1989). She has been the recipient of numerous awards including the Nancy Graves Foundation Grant (2014); Smithsonian American Art Museum Lucelia Artist Award (2002); Anonymous Was a Woman (2000); and a Guggenheim Fellowship (1999). Work by the artist is held in prominent international collections, including the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas, Austin; Dallas Museum of Art; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Colección Jumex, Mexico City; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; MAK-Austrian Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna; Milwaukee Art Museum; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Illustrations:

Illustration 1: Liz Larner, *Striae*, 2020. Illustration 2: *Bird in Space*, 1989, The Smithsonian Museum of American Art. Illustration 3: Installation view of *Chained Perspective: Reversed, Reflected*, 1992, Kunsthhaus Graz, 2006. Illustration 4: Liz Larner, *Blackbird (inflexion)*, 2020. Illustration 5: Installation view of *Liz Larner*, Aspen Art Museum, 2016. Illustration 6: Liz Larner, *Open handed*, 2020.