

CHEIM & READ

Art in America

September 2004

Lynda Benglis at Cheim & Read

A pioneer of Post-Minimalism, Lynda Benglis remains best known for her poured sculptures of the late 1960s. Several of these groundbreaking works were displayed in this concise survey of her career, which presented 19 sculptures in various mediums from 1967 to 2004. Yet the show also affirmed the significance of Benglis's subsequent work, which has continued to generate allusive forms from self-evident processes and gestures.

Benglis first made a name for herself by translating Jackson Pollock's drip technique into sculptural forms. Pouring pigmented latex and polyurethane foam directly on the floor, she created works like *Night Sherbet A* (1968), a vivid puddle of fluorescent green, orange and red foam that suggests melting ice cream. The painterly flatness of these early pours soon gave way to more substantial volumes, which were often cast in monochromatic metals. The dark leaden mass of

Quartered Meteor (1969), for example, seems to ooze like lava from a corner of the gallery. In both cases, the once-liquid materials have found their own shapes, defined with a minimum of artistic intervention.

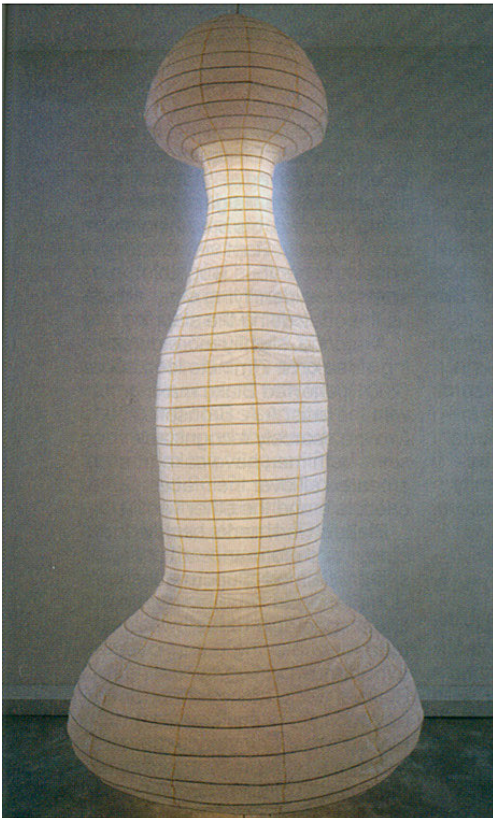
Since the early 1970s, Benglis has exerted greater control over her materials. Nonetheless, blatant processes have remained central to her work, as have references to the human figure. For the series of wall-mounted "knot" sculptures, Benglis configured lengths of cotton bunting into loose knots before spraying them with liquefied metals. While clearly demonstrating twisting, looping and other basic constructive gestures, the knots also reference the body. The copper tangle of *Uno* (1974), for example, resembles a pair of crossed arms, each end flattened into a fan shape that reads as a hand.

The human body is

also conjured in the pleated sculptures that Benglis began making in the 1980s, a portion of her oeuvre that merits greater critical attention. After pressing sheets of steel mesh into tight accordion folds, Benglis unfurled the pleats into vaguely sartorial shapes that she covered in shiny metals. Works like the bronze-coated *Bolero* (1991-92) suggest sumptuous capes, gowns and other garments while remaining essentially abstract. Here Benglis generates remarkably complex rhythms of contraction and expansion from the modest act of folding.

The most recent sculpture in the show was *Bikini Incandescent Column* (2004), a 13½-foot-tall paper lantern illuminated from within by lightbulbs. Its hourglass shape evokes the female form and atomic mushroom clouds, both referred to in the title. As a vessel "containing" the diffusion of light, the lantern suggests Benglis's abiding interest in the general phenomenon of expansion. But the anomalous use of electricity resists more specific connections to the rest of her work. It will be interesting to witness how such a physically engaged sculptor continues to address the immateriality of light.

—Matthew Guy Nichols



Lynda Benglis: *Bikini Incandescent Column*, 2004, paper, wire, light, 13½ by 6 by 6 feet; at Cheim & Read.