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Galleries: Sculptor Lynda Benglis reexamining color's possibilities

By Edith Newhall
For The Inquirer

Lynda Benglis seems to be picking up where she left off a few decades ago, or so her show at Locks Gallery suggests. After years of exploring metals and silver and gold surfaces, the sculptor - whose traveling retrospective "Lynda Benglis" currently is on view at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum and moves to New York's New Museum in February - has returned to color. It may not be a re-embrace to the eventual exclusion of the metallic, but it certainly appears that Benglis has decided to reexamine color's possibilities.

Her tinted polyurethane sculpture Swinburne Egg I, made last year, is a take-no-prisoners Schiaparelli hot pink; Chiron and D'arrest, also from 2009, are a glowing orange-red that seems lit from within. The forms of these three are simpler and more self-contained than Benglis' sculptures have ever been, suggesting a consolidation of many of her past efforts. Swinburne Egg I and Chiron look like immense decorated eggs or the tops of curly-haired human heads or brains mounted on a wall (or perhaps wigs fashioned from translucent jelly candy worms, all the same hue). Benglis always has been good at simultaneously summoning the gross and the beautiful; now, five decades into her career, she can still pull that off beautifully, though she can err on the cruder side.



"Chiron," by Lynda Benglis, a tinted polyurethane sculpture that is part of her "Flow and Flesh" show at Locks Gallery.

Among the other recent series represented here are Benglis's wall-mounted "Figure" sculptures, cast in bronze and patinated a matte black, all from 2009 and all reminiscent of the human figure; her polyurethane casts of vase and plate forms arranged totemically, in this case, the three-part Black Ice from 2009. They are unmistakably her work, and they, more than the colored sculptures, emphasize this show's title, "Flow and Flesh."

Being a fan of Benglis' influential work from the early 1970s, especially her poured latex pieces in which various colors formed rivulets - imagine a Gene Davis stripe painting as various flavors of ice cream in the process of melting - I hope for more color, even glitter, in the future.

Anne Agee, who has Locks' ground floor, makes gorgeously painted and glazed ceramic platters inspired by her home and studio and the relationship between the two architectural spaces; she assembles them intentionally awkwardly on steel armatures. She also paints Matissean - or perhaps more rectilinear, Sarah McEneaney - images of architectural intersections she has found in the interior

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of her house. And then there are her vases, pure and unadorned, and her lewd, if remarkably carefully modeled, porcelain sculptures, which cannot be described accurately here. (Imagine a sexual interaction among a girl, a boy, and a horse and you probably haven't got it right).

This is disparate work, though it all looks good together. Agee's exhibition is immediately impressive as an installation and should be taken as such.

