

# ***Jo Baer – Lynda Benglis – Jutta Koether***

## **Trio exhibition 2009**

### **20/6 – 4/10/2009**

### **Lynda Benglis**

From 20 June to 4 October 2009 there is a Trio exhibition of the work of Jo Baer, Lynda Benglis, Jutta Koether in the Oudbouw (Old Building) of the Van Abbemuseum. This is the fourth time that the Van Abbemuseum organises a trio exhibition, this time with solo presentations of three generations of artists: Jo Baer (1929), Lynda Benglis (1941), and Jutta Koether (1958). They are connected by their choice for 'painting'. Not pure painting, the non-narrative painting which does not refer to anything outside itself, but an evaluation of the phenomenon of painting in terms of art criticism. In the ten halls of the monumental Oudbouw, Baer, Benglis and Koether tackle certain aspects of the history and current practice of painting from different perspectives. The exhibition makes clear that the medium of painting is not the only medium for them to challenge the tradition of painting. From the mid sixties to now these artists work, each in their own way, with a range of mediums like video, sculpture, installation and text. This Trio exhibition highlights their individual works, while at the same time the visitor can explore the potential links between the artists' positions. This is Lynda Benglis's first solo exhibition in a museum in Europe. Her study of form, surface and meaning becomes visible in a diversity of works, including *Blatt* (1969), *Eat Meat* (1969-1975), *Wing* (1970) and the videos *Now* (1973) and *Female Sensibility* (1973). The visitor gets an impression of her groundbreaking influence on visual art.

#### **Challenging the art of painting**

*"It wasn't breaking away from painting but trying to redefine what it was", Lynda Benglis, 2006.*

Lynda Benglis (Lake Charles, 1941, lives and works in New York, Santa Fe and Ahmadabad (India) is seen as one of the American pioneers who uses a form of 'lyrical abstraction' in order to question movements such as modernism and minimalism in a critical way. The works which Lynda Benglis has created during her forty years as an artist reveal an artist with strong convictions. The way in which she carries out her research into form, surface and meaning confirm her current influence on contemporary visual art. The solo exhibition in the Van Abbemuseum shows her extremely creative production from the early totem-like reliefs in wax, via the 'fallen paintings', videos and her 'knots' from the 1970s, up to the gilded, folded figures from the 1980s and her recent works in polyurethane and aluminium.

This is the first time that the work of Lynda Benglis is exhibited in a European museum on a large scale. The exhibition offers a unique opportunity to study her impact on visual art; since the 1960s, she has constantly challenged the prevailing views on painting and sculpture



Lynda Benglis, *Blatt*, 1969, Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York, Art © Lynda Benglis/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

#### **Large variety of works**

*"The ability to step aside and contradict oneself is the nature of art", Lynda Benglis, 2000.*

At one moment Benglis's work is aesthetically justified and a testimony to her good taste, while the next moment it deliberately uses dirty colours, and the work openly flirts with concepts such as bad taste and ugliness. Her work is largely determined by feminism and eroticism and also comprises conceptual works, performances and video. Her approach is provocative and often ironic. From the mid-1970s, her works are increasingly characterized by their tempting kitsch character and she reveals her predilection for experimenting with materials and media. In the creative process, the boundaries of her own body - for instance the length of a stretched arm while making

a gesture - are a determining factor. The works are therefore sometimes characterized as 'frozen gestures', in which Benglis emphasises the need for the sensitive, tactile and personal signature of the author. In her approach to abstraction she tries to maintain the tension between the creative process and the end product. She tries to demythologize the creative moment by being open about how the work is created.

The totem-like reliefs, the so-called wax paintings with which Lynda Benglis started in 1967-1968, introduce some of the characteristics which are also manifested in her later work. These include her interest in the human dimension; in structure, texture and colour, in the boundaries between painting and sculpture; in the references to physical, psychological and organic aspects; in erotic references and strong female sensuality. This resulted in her 'fallen paintings', in which liquid materials such as latex and polyurethane foam are cast on the floor and against the wall. These works are reminiscent of the 'drippings' of Jackson Pollack or the abstract paintings of Morris Louis and Helen Frankenthaler. They also evoke memories of Serra's performances in which he threw liquid lead against the wall; the work *Blatt* (1969) is a good example of this. A number of the fallen paintings from the period 1968-1970 were later transformed by using other materials including lead and aluminium. Benglis is fascinated by metal because it has a permanent character, but it can also be melted into a liquid substance. *Eat Meat* (1975) suggests solidified lava, but the title indicates a different context. In *Wing* (1975) Benglis gives weight to gravity.



Lynda Benglis, *Eat Meat*, 1969-75, Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York  
Art © Lynda Benglis/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

The addition of the fluorescent 'day glo' pigment turns the solidified substances into vulgar cave-like reliefs. Benglis tries to stimulate the viewer with this element of kitsch, to challenge him (or her) to make a judgement about good taste and bad taste. In her glittering 'knotted' work *Psi* (1973), she manages to force the viewer to adopt a position with her use of glitter, glamour and colourful pigments. In 1989, with regard to good and bad taste,

Benglis stated: "*There will always be a Puritan strain in society that gets nervous if things are too pleasurable, too beautiful or too open. That's the most significant legacy of feminist art; it taught us not to be afraid to express these things.*"

The growing interest of Benglis in the creative process and the study of materials and their effects on the public led her to examine the possibilities of a large number of materials in more detail. This varies from synthetic resin, glass and wood to casting liquid latex, aluminium and nickel.



Lynda Benglis, *Psi*, 1973, Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York. Art © Lynda Benglis/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

In addition to her sculptural work, which is focused on the process, her oeuvre consists of videos and photographs. In these she presents a parody of self-reflection. Her video *Now* (1973) inspired the American art historian Rosalind Krauss to write the key work in the theory of art, *Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism*, in 1976. Throughout the video, the artist constantly asks the questions 'Now?' and 'Do you wish to direct me?' and repeats commands such as 'Start the camera' and 'I said start recording'. With the word 'Now' used as question and as a command, she emphasises the deceptive "real time" of the video. In addition, it is the first video in which she manipulates colour as a visual medium to an extreme extent. Form and content play an essential dialogue in this. Benglis's video *Female Sensibility* (1973) explains sexual prejudices of that era in a villainous way. At the same time, it is

**Press release**  
**May 2009**

groundbreaking work, both in early video art and as a documentary film.

The exhibition in the Van Abbemuseum also contains documentary materials with which Benglis's interest in performance and self-promotion is represented with the use of magazines and invitation cards. This also includes her most famous campaign: the 'dildo' advertisement in Artforum (November 1974).

**Locations after the Van Abbemuseum**

The solo exhibition of Lynda Benglis will travel on the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) in Dublin, Ireland (4 November 2009 to 24 January 2010), to Le Consortium in Dijon, France, June-August 2010) and to the Museum of Art Rhode Island School of design (RISD) in Providence, USA (September 2010-January 2011).

**Curator**

The exhibition of Lynda Benglis, part of the Trio exhibition *Jo Baer, Lynda Benglis, Jutta Koether*, is curated by Diana Franssen.

**Partners**

Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) in Dublin, Ireland  
Le Consortium in Dijon, France  
Museum of Art van de Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in Providence, USA

**Blend special *Jo Baer - Lynda Benglis - Jutta Koether***

In co-operation with Blend magazine a special publication is realised, in which the idea of a traditional exhibition catalogue is raised to a higher level. In stead of an abstract of the exhibited works, this publication is compiled of specially made interviews, photo shoots and artworks, inspired by the oeuvre of the three artists. The special publication is for sale at the opening and during the exhibition. It is also available in stores. Selling price €5,95

**Van Abbemuseum**

Van Abbemuseum  
Bilderdijklaan 10  
Eindhoven

**Opening hours**

Tuesday - Sunday 11.00 - 17.00  
Thursday 11.00 - 21.00

**Admission**

adults € 8,50  
groups >15, visitors 65+ € 6  
students / CJP card holders € 4  
Thursday night 17.00 - 21.00 free admission

For more details visit  
[www.vanabbemuseum.nl](http://www.vanabbemuseum.nl)

**Note for Editors**

More information and images can be downloaded directly at:  
[www.vanabbemuseum.nl/press](http://www.vanabbemuseum.nl/press)

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