

Wilson, William. Review. *Los Angeles Times* (Calendar), 22 January 1982: Part VI, p. 10.

10 Part VI / Friday, January 22, 1982

GALLERIES

LA CIENEGA AREA

New York artist Lynda Benglis has spent time on the West Coast for a decade and more, participated in group exhibitions and small solo shows, while remaining somewhat vague artistically. We at last get a decent look at a range of her sculpture in an exhibition titled "Flux and Fusion." It includes some 24 objects surveying her output since 1970, and a very curious *oeuvre* it is.

Contemporary art watchers are accustomed to art that subsists on tension derived from internal contradiction, the sensibility is virtually stock in trade. Even at that the characteristic is so marked in Benglis' work as to make the whole appear as the sweetly sarcastic end result of an approach-avoidance conflict.

Benglis is attracted to forms so ugly they are all but Dadaist in their rejection of visual blandishment. The technically remarkable "Wing," from around 1970, is a huge lump of aluminum that seems to have coagulated into a solid as it leaped several feet off the wall in a molten state. A floor work titled "Modern Art Pair" looks like nothing so much as two monumental cow-pies and clearly has no reason for being other than to wage scathing satire against the subculture to which they owe their existence.

The balance of the work—mainly wall-suspended objects—consists of awkwardly pleated planes and writhing linear structures made of everything from bronze to plaster. They introduce two more contradictions. Often they are gold-leafed or copper-sprayed in a demonstrated love of trashy opulence worthy of Liberace. You could hang one in a *nouveau-riche* Beverly Hills mansion and barely notice that it is, in fact, making fun of the dolphin-shaped gold spigots in the john.

Finally, after all this swaggering artistic tough, it dawns on us that the wall works particularly refer to ladies' fans and pretty little knotted scarves donned to spruce up an outfit. Frankly, I have considerable trouble embracing an art that stirs up maximum trouble, while offering minimal solution. All the same, it is interesting and possibly significant sociopsychological material that we are glad enough to see and wonder why a museum didn't present it.

On view in a small upstairs gallery is a portfolio of eight lithographs by as many prominent artists. It was published by Gemini and is being sold to benefit the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts Inc. in New York. David Hockney's "Celia" is the witty Briton at his Bonnardesque best. Sam Francis' big blue splash is dynamic. Works by Guston, Johns, Kelly, Nauman, Rauschenberg and Serra struck me as the sort of half-hearted turns celebrities sometimes deliver on charity telethons. (Margo Leavin Gallery, 812 N. Robertson Blvd. Exhibitions end Feb. 20 and 13 respectively.)

—WILLIAM WILSON