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Kindred Spirits

By Edith Newhall
For the Inquirer

Until I saw the two one-person exhibitions of recent work by Neysa Grassi and Lynda Benglis at Locks Gallery, I hadn't realized how much these artists have in common. Not only do Grassi, a painter, and Benglis, a sculptor, revisit and build on their previous efforts, their images and forms often share a similar coiling, organic quality.

The title Grassi chose for her show, "Losing and Finding," is the heading of a chapter from David Sylvester's 1997 book, *Looking at Giacometti*, in which he writes of Giacometti's process of "incessantly building, effacing, and building again." This describes Grassi's own method - painting, scraping, then repainting the surfaces of her canvases - to a T. Each layer of her process is revealed in her paintings, the end result giving the impression of an ancient tablet or excavated decorative fragment.

Grassi's paintings from the past six years continue her investigations of patterns, such as stripes that simultaneously evoke a rib cage or a zebra as seen from above, or maze- and knot-like formations that can read as rope or intestines. She does seem to have steered away from the use of bright color and misty veils in her new work, which makes her images less referential and more mysterious.

"Shape-Shifters," the title of Benglis' show, could cover all the bodies of work Benglis has created throughout her career (it would make an inspired subtitle for a museum retrospective), but it seems particularly apt here, given the subtle pale violets, soft bronze and silvery grays of her sculptures, which emphasize their seeming mutability. As with most of Benglis' work - and Grassi's, too - these pieces from several recent series seem to have emerged from her earlier work.

Benglis' five series of cast sculptures use a wide range of materials - silver, steel, bronze, and polyurethane - and an entire show could have been devoted to three of them. She is also showing a series of works composed of rubberized foam sprayed



Untitled, 2008, oil on linen, 60 x 56 inches



King Pin II, 2007, cast silver, 13 x 19 x 10 1/2 inches

from a nozzle onto chicken-wire armatures. The forms of these works and those in her other series suggest coral, rocks, and various objects that have spent many years under the sea. (For better or worse, intestines occasionally come to mind here, too.)

The most dramatic of Benglis' recent series is *The Graces*, represented here by three towering, purple-tinged, translucent cast-polyurethane sculptures, each one a seeming balancing act of several vase forms - until you notice that each has a steel rod at its core that attaches to a solid, presumably extremely heavy, lead base. Benglis does not hide the mechanics of her pieces; rather, like Grassi, she makes the most of them.