

East End Review

Encounters: Giacometti x Lynda Benglis – earthy dialogue with a pop of glitter

Artists Lynda Benglis and Alberto Giacometti may not be a natural pair on the surface, but in an exhibition at the Barbican, the parallels are plain to see

By Sarah Birch
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L O C K S G A L L E R Y



The exhibition brings together work by Lynda Benglis and Alberto Giacometti.
Photograph: Barbican Art Gallery, Reliant Imaging

'Back at ya' is the cheeky American slang expression that subtitles the Barbican's third and final encounter between Alberto Giacometti and contemporary artists. In this edition of the series, a range of previously unseen work by Lynda Benglis engages in an earthy dialogue with those of the 20th century Swiss master.

From her handmade studio in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Benglis shapes basic materials into ethereal sculptures that blend form and colour in almost weightless configurations.

The parallels with Alberto Giacometti can be found in the ways the two artists work their material, drawing on their own territorial origins, and also on ancestral artistic techniques and 'found' textures to create objects that are, in some sense, outside time.



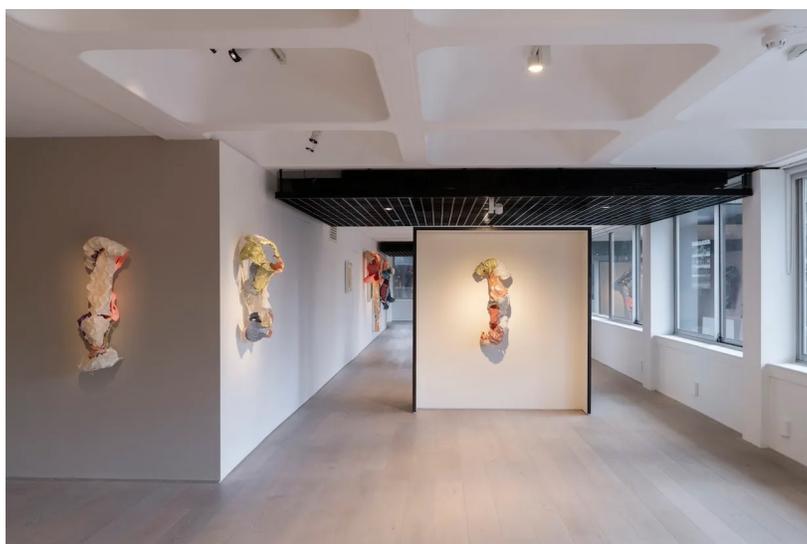
Parallels can be found in the ways the artists work with their materials. Photograph: Barbican Art Gallery, Reliant Imaging



Benglis's handmade paper, applied as pulp to chicken wire, emulates bones and flesh. Most engaging are her off-white works that almost – but not quite – resemble casts of the human body. In *Frogman*, *Preborn* and *Cliff Dweller* you are sure you can see a figure, but when you try to map it onto human anatomy, the correspondence eludes you.

Giacometti tends in the opposite direction; his largely representational works veer toward abstraction. So the two artists meet somewhere in the middle. The noble serenity of iconic mid-century sculptures such as *Woman with a Chariot* and *Standing Woman* is an elegant counterpoint to the nonchalance through which Benglis explores bodily contours.

Some may find the American sculptor's use of glitter challenging to engage with (too similar to what your kids bring home from school?), but its very 'craftiness' obliges you to focus on the materiality of her oeuvre.



Process is central to the work of both artists. Photograph: Barbican Art Gallery, Reliant Imaging

You'll also be treated to Giacometti's stunning 'wall paintings' emulating the figures drawn and carved on caves and early human buildings, reminding you not only what images our forebears first fashioned, but also how.

Process is central to this exhibition. Giacometti worked paint into plaster; so too Benglis daubs colour on her rough paper shapes, ignoring traditional boundaries between genres.

In transcending time and culture, this series of Barbican shows has done an impressive job of refocusing classic themes, and Lynda Benglis's in-your-face organicism may even make you want to get your hands dirty in the studio.

Encounters: Giacometti x Lynda Benglis. Barbican Level 2. Until 31 May. Find out more here.

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