

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Lynda Benglis**  
*Excavation*

**Blum & Poe, Los Angeles**  
**May 14–June 25, 2022**

**Opening Reception: Saturday, May 14, 5–7pm**

Los Angeles, CA, April 27, 2022—Blum & Poe is pleased to present *Excavation*, canonical artist Lynda Benglis's second solo exhibition with the gallery.

One might think of excavation as a form of most laborious searching. To be successful within this pursuit, the seeker must not merely arrive at their desired end but must also remove or strip back what has previously existed, displacing or repurposing the original material in order to create a wholly new outcome. Now imagine that the search in question concerns the extraction of a new, cohesive narrative from a lifetime of philosophical and tangible output. To excavate such an entity would be a formidable and impressive task indeed.

In the case of this exhibition, *Excavation* alludes to the present themes in a twofold manner. Firstly, it mines Benglis's celebrated past to make new history by furthering the artist's explorations of the gestural and the form of the knot. Secondly, this presentation materializes through the exchange of negative and positive space—a process that is also undertaken in digging or displacing earth—through the act of cast-making, wherein one creates nothing from something and then something from nothing again.

Swirling, spiraling, rising, and cascading, the sculptures that comprise *Excavation* nod to a form that Benglis has used to much acclaim and scrutiny throughout the course of her career: the gesture of the knot. *Village Voice* critic John Perreault famously decried Benglis's original sparkle knot sculptures, created between 1972 and 1974, as “too garish to be pretty and too beautiful to be vulgar.” The sculptures in *Excavation*, these almost knots, thumb their noses at this comment. Woven less tightly than their predecessors, these works, which curl and intersect yet never truly bind, create a burning anticipation that doesn't quite resolve itself. Benglis has connected her interest in knots to time spent crocheting with her grandmother, thus situating her use of this form in a long lineage of craft and women's work. If the knots presented in *Excavation* were to be used in traditional craft, however, they would be unable to fulfill their intended functions. Their constructions are too weak, their ends too untethered, to be mistaken for the beautiful yet utilitarian objects of craftswomen past. These sculptures, while alluding to craft, perform it rather poorly—and yet, they declare this fact proudly for all to see. *Power Tower* (2019) commands attention with its seven-and-a-half-foot height and flashy material composition of White Tombasil bronze. If it is “too garish to be pretty,” then it is because this piece is meant, as the title asserts, to hold power in its physicality, though its origins are quite humble.

The ceramics presented here, or “Elephant Necklaces” as the artist refers to them, are the works from which the larger sculptures in the exhibition take their forms. The contrast between hardy cast bronze and fragile ceramic presented in *Excavation* points to a moment of transition between scale, materials, texture, mass, and coloration. Gender, class connotations, and an overarching cultural tendency to struggle with pluralism subtend these aesthetic qualities, pitting hard against soft, delicate against strong, showy against restrained, and excess against moderation. The observation of these contrasts serves to make the viewer aware that such qualities exist to a greater or lesser degree in all the objects present in the exhibition. They exist also in

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the viewers themselves, made visible in the reflective surfaces of the bronzes. Through the lens of *Excavation*'s sheeny exteriors, dichotomies unite to become spectrums.

One through line in Benglis's long career is a consistent inquiry into surface aesthetics. In *Excavation*, smooth, reflective surfaces force viewers to gaze at themselves and others, while the finish of an object, with color or materiality determining its perceived worth, is evocative of socioeconomic divides. This series sees Benglis returning to an exploration of surface, as begun in her early knots. From 1972 to 1974, these forms were covered in glitter and later—in a separate body of work, created from 1973 to 1976—sprayed with a metallic layer of aluminum, copper, or tin. The bronze casting process is a logical step in the material trajectory of Benglis's oeuvre, but the origins of these pieces are more pleasurable than the average bronze. They are rooted in—and emphasize—the decorative as opposed to the austere. A core tenet of the Pattern and Decoration movement, with which Benglis has been occasionally associated, is that art should be undertaken for enjoyment; flourishes and finishes should be indulged in and flamboyance is paramount.

To unite joy and power under the umbrella of that which refuses to be categorized is to create something novel at a time when, despite the fact that Benglis has been gesturing toward these problems for a half-century, societies of the world are still in the process of rectifying the inequities that they have allowed to proliferate—gender inequality, lack of class mobility, and a rigid sense of gender binaries. As these divides persist, Benglis continues to hone her practice: mining her oeuvre for the most effective tropes and physicalizing them through new and expansive material processes. The result is neither pretty nor garish, beautiful nor vulgar—it is the sum of these qualities at their best.

Lynda Benglis (b. 1941, Lake Charles, LA) lives and works in New York, NY; Santa Fe, NM; Kastellorizo, Greece; and Ahmedabad, India. Benglis's work has been the subject of recent solo exhibitions at major museums around the world, including the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, TX (2022); National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. (2021); Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens, Greece (2019); Kistefos-Museet, Jevnaker, Norway (2018); Museo Internacional del Barroco, Puebla, Mexico (2016); Bergen Assembly, KODE Art Museums of Bergen, Norway (2016); Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, CO (2016); Hepworth Wakefield, West Yorkshire, UK (2015); and Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, NY (2015).

Benglis is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and two National Endowment for the Arts grants, among other commendations. Her work is held in numerous public collections including Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX; Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia; New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA; Tate Modern, London, UK; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY.

## About Blum & Poe

Blum & Poe was founded by Tim Blum and Jeff Poe in Santa Monica in September of 1994 as a space to show local and international contemporary art in all media. Blum's extensive experience in the Japanese art world combined with Poe's keen knowledge of emerging artists in Los Angeles resulted in an international program of influential artists. Throughout a twenty-seven-year history, Blum & Poe has shaped the

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trajectory of contemporary art by championing artists at all stages of their careers—cultivating the lineages that run between emerging and established practices and working with artist estates to generate new discourse surrounding historical work. Currently, Blum & Poe represents fifty artists and nine estates from sixteen countries worldwide.

In 2003 the gallery moved to a larger space in Culver City, and in 2009 Blum & Poe purchased and renovated its current 22,000-square-foot complex on La Cienega Boulevard. In this location the gallery has since staged museum-caliber surveys, examining the historical work of such movements as the Japanese Mono-ha school (2012); the Korean Dansaekhwa monochrome painters (2014); the European postwar movement CoBrA (2015); Japanese art of 1980s and '90s (2019); a rereading of Brazilian Modernism (2019); and a revisionist take on the 1959 MoMA exhibition, *New Images of Man* (2020). To produce these exhibitions, Blum & Poe has worked with celebrated curators such as Alison M. Gingeras, Sofia Gotti, Joan Kee, and Mika Yoshitake.

In 2014, Blum & Poe opened galleries in New York and Tokyo to focus on intimately scaled projects in new contexts. These expansions tie into the gallery's wide-reaching program that includes exhibitions, lectures, performance series, screenings, and an annual art book fair at its base in Los Angeles. Blum & Poe's publishing division democratically circulates its program through original scholarship and accessible media ranging from academic monographs, audio series, magazines, to artists' books. In 2020, the gallery launched Blum & Poe Broadcasts, an online platform showcasing artists' projects in conjunction with physical installations or as standalone digital endeavors.


Across the three global locations, Blum & Poe prioritizes environmental and community stewardship in all operations. In 2015, Blum & Poe was certified as an Arts:Earth Partnership (AEP) green art gallery in Los Angeles and consequently became one of the first green certified galleries in the United States. The gallery is also a member of the Gallery Climate Coalition, which works to facilitate a more sustainable commercial art world and reduce the industry's collective carbon footprint. Blum & Poe is committed to fostering inclusive and equitable communities both in their physical and online spaces and believes that everybody should have equal access to creating and engaging with contemporary art.

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