

REGEN PROJECTS

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ARTFORUM

LOS ANGELES

Liz Larner

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"We all want stability," Liz Larner once commented, "but it's forever slipping away from us, even on the most personal level." Larner's new series of ceramic sculptures suggests that stability eludes us on the most objective, terrestrial level as well. Combining a global outlook on geology with a locally sourced sensibility formed in Southern California, Larner's exhibition—comprising twelve wall-mounted ceramics, three large-scale sculptures, and a small gallery of related work—offered a meditation on the surface realities of inhabiting the earth. The wall works—which, despite their smoothness, I think of as reliefs, owing to their frontal, topographical quality, at once sculptural and painterly—are elliptical or rectangular slabs rolled out to about three feet in length and then folded and flattened, severed and reunited, or induced by chemical reactions to crack around the edges. Larner named the resulting objects according to various tectonic or poetic conditions they analogize: inflexion, caesura, subduction, mantle, passage.

Liz Larner, *110 Fwy, June Gloom and Shrimp Tacos*, 2013, glass, steel, bacterial culture on nutrient agar, detritus from 110 Freeway, sampling of "June Gloom," shrimp tacos, 13 1/4 x 13 1/4 x 6 1/4".



The work displayed in a side gallery spoke to the long history of Larner's interest in organicism. *Orchid, Buttermilk, Penny*, 1987, from the ongoing "Culture" series, 1987–, in which Larner photographs the decay of organic materials or the changing states of bacteria in petri dishes, hung across from *Tropicana Pool Water, Mercury and Guitar Strings*, 1987, a sculpture contained in a jar and shown beside a photograph of the work basking poolside in the late '80s at LA's Tropicana Motel. Today the guitar strings are clumped with gunk and the pool water looks rusty. Along with a new "Culture" work produced last year during a particularly cold and overcast start to the summer in Southern California—*110 Fwy, June Gloom and Shrimp Tacos*—this collection of living/dying sculptures attested to a dramatic jump in the scale of Larner's thinking, from these self-contained experiments in biochemistry to the earth's plate tectonics. Both new and old "Cultures" also reinforce the idea that "thinking globally" is always mediated by one's social and

environmental conditions, which Larner's work discloses through its engagement with the popular culture of greater LA.

Some of these references are quite direct—including specific hotels and freeways—while others are more suggestive. The installation of Larner's ceramics as horizontal, shallow reliefs coming off the wall, for instance, bore a clear similarity to the ubiquitous wall-mounted skateboard decks that adorn the taco shacks and burger joints of LA. The process by which the color is applied to the objects also plays a role in the Pop sensibility of this work. Rather than being traditionally glazed, the reliefs are each cured with a pigmented epoxy after being fired in a kiln, which leaves a highly reflective, semitransparent surface reminiscent of the high-gloss, candy-coated finishes on SoCal's custom cars. In some instances,

such as *i (subduction)* and *ii (subduction)*, both 2013, these surfaces come across as more properly "earthen" in their muted tones of gray, violet, and brown, akin to satellite photographs of the earth, but in other works, such as *mantle* and *vii (caesura)*, both 2013, the color vibrantly plumes and streaks in pink, orange, and turquoise.

Equally striking is the reflective quality of these surfaces, which act as scarred and cracked mirrors for the spectator standing before them. In three works installed across from large plate-glass windows, the reflection of the spectator inside the gallery was evocatively collaged with an image of the street outside on the surface of the ceramic. It is notable that each of Larner's earlier organic works existed both as a physical object and in a photographic series. Her new work is equally attuned to the partial and changing surfaces through which we experience the materiality of the earth, but in these ceramics, still images have been replaced by unstable reflections fed back to us in real time—prompting us to think globally by looking locally.

—James Nisbet