

REGEN PROJECTS

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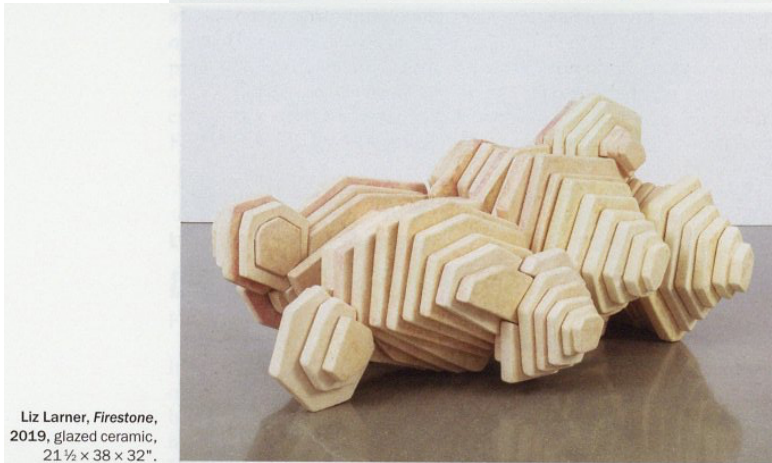
Liz Larner

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In her 1994 book *Nomadic Subjects*, Rosi Braidotti frames the body not as a biological category, but as "a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological." The "nomadic" feminism she proposes suggests that subjects could promiscuously seek out interconnectedness by rejecting the coded, exclusionary systems of essentialism and nationalism. In resisting the illusion of fixed identities, then, nomadic feminists *formally* disrupt the symbolic meanings of the body and the self.

Braidotti's book was among a number of theoretical and poetic texts that Liz Larner left for visitors to peruse at the gallery's front desk during her summer exhibition—a quiet example of her commitment to formal interventions as political actions. As Larner has demonstrated throughout her career, feminist transformations of artmaking happen not when one changes the content of the image but when one alters the parameters of its form.

Many of Larner's large-scale metal sculptures from the 1990s and 2000s prodded viewers to rethink the static finality of such geometric forms as the cube; in the past decade she has created a significant body



Liz Larner, *Firestone*,
2019, glazed ceramic,
21 ½ × 38 × 32".

of work in clay, including a series of slablike, wall-based ceramics that continue to foreground her interest in physical instability and rupture. A few of the latter works were included here alongside several new floor sculptures that showed her expanding her recent experimentations with clay into larger and more ambitious forms while building on the formal vocabularies of preceding generations of feminist artists.

In *Reef*, 2019, an oozing clay mound snaked across the gallery floor in an elongated horseshoe shape that covered an area of nearly fourteen by eight feet. Within its seductive surface were embedded chunky, glittering stones and minerals. Viscid glazes of overlapping hues pooled and dripped across indentations and ridges. With *Reef*, Larner collapses the boundaries between painting, sculpture, and ceramics. The floor-bound, flowing shape calls to mind the form and spirit of Lynda Benglis's poured sculptures of the mid-'60s, which remain potent challenges to the machismo of both medium specificity and Minimalism, while the pooling pastel pigments signal a debt to Helen Frankenthaler's stained palette of mossy and seafoam greens, baby blues, pale and salmon pinks, and tawny browns. Larner follows in the footsteps of Benglis and Frankenthaler by foregrounding uncontrolled processes and unintended effects. Not only is *Reef* jigsawed together from more than a dozen connected ceramic chunks, but many of the sections sport additional cracks and fractures. The materials themselves are cocreators—they may drip unexpectedly, break at high heat, or meld into unforeseen color combinations. By embracing entropic processes and material vulnerabilities, Larner rejects any claims on artistic mastery or coherent, fixed forms.

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In another ceramic floor sculpture, *Firestone*, 2019—Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) was among the texts at the desk—Larner took on the ultimate art-historical icon of sexual and racial difference: the reclining nude. Built out of stacked, hexagonal clay plates, the sculpture's highly abstracted form is vaguely recumbent, but the primary allusion to the odalisque was supplied by a neighboring pencil drawing of two women inelegantly sleeping in a living room, a scene copied from Marguerite Duras's 1972 film *Nathalie Granger*. In both works, Larner plays with the legibility of the gendered body: Duras's women are fully clothed and in poses that don't overtly display their bodies to the viewer, while *Firestone* is barely figurative. In putting these two works together, Larner demonstrated how one might define the gendered body over time and in relation to other objects—without essentializing or fixing its meaning. In both the sculpture and the drawing, Larner has changed not the *content* of the representation of the body, but the form of it.

In the exhibition's title, "As Below, So Above," Larner inverted the classic hermetic aphorism "as above, so below." In its new order, the phrase echoes the feminist maxim "The personal is political," reminding us that in changing the way we think about the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological on an individual scale, we inevitably shape the larger picture.

—Ashton Cooper