

Game Being, a catalog essay

During five intense days in the fall of 1995, Lynda Benglis began a collaboration with the PRINT Press, the fine arts press at the University of North Texas that culminated in *Game Being*. Benglis worked with Master Printmaker Stan Baden to produce 12 images that use as their point of departure nineteenth century engravings based on Zuni hunting fetishes.

Benglis drew from images thought to be associated with the ancient Zuni Gods of the Chase, such as Wolf, Mole, Ground Owl and Coyote. She recontextualized these powerful spiritual forms by means of Xeroxing and enlarging replicas of the engravings from an 1881 Bureau of Ethnography Report.

The large Xeroxed images take on the visual overtones of a phallus rather than the animals for which they originally stood. Mixed and re-mixed, Benglis translated them into photo transparencies that became the basis of a sugar lift copper etching, screen and aluminum based lithograph prints. Rapidly drawn abstract linear sketches and a landscape created on Mylar with Xerox toner and windex.

Benglis approaches printmaking like assemblage. Elements like Mylar maintain their identity as object as well as image. She works spatially as much as in the flat plane. Color changed as the series developed. Initially subtle low hued tans appeared; in later work the artist added primaries, red, blue, and yellow. The result is 12 different prints invoking layers of experience, visceral, aesthetic, spiritual, emotional and psychological.

The psychic energy of the original fetishes and their position in society in connection with big game hunting rituals is re-engaged through Benglis' own very different and personal art-making rituals. They provide a charge that mixes with her own psychic presence as an artist. The fact that the animals appeared as erect phalluses, our own twentieth century fetish of the hunt, gives them an ironic, but also aggressive presence in the prints. They seem both captured and charged, not domesticated or trapped, but surge with an energy that spreads through the prints.

There is also a delicacy, a fragility and tenderness that seems to be partner to the aggressive forms. As Benglis appropriated the images, she also redefined them. They are no longer of the Zuni; they are of the late twentieth century art world.

Underneath all the layers also lies the original ritual, the lost ritual, the hidden ritual of the Hunt. The lost art can never be recovered, but it was re-invoked and re-energized by Benglis, who has spent much of the last year in the Southwest. *Game Being* is about the original game hunt, the search for the essence of the animals, as well as about Benglis' modern game of art.

Chimera, Benglis 1995 series, makes another reference to native gods in works such as "Tlaloc Q Doll A". Tlaloc is the Aztec rain god. In this piece, the god is invoked in a two foot extruded clay sculpture in which the title seems to imply not an icon of the god, but an archeological remnant (*Chimera*, Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Boulder, 1995)

Game Being is also an intervention, elaboration and reinvention of the technique of printmaking that is vintage Benglis. In their improvisational formal relationships and technical experiments, the prints continue Benglis' trademark of immediate engagement with process. This is paired with an inventive alteration of traditional approaches. She playfully insisted on using etching ink for lithographic printing or incompatible drawing media on Mylar.

Benglis frequently works collaboratively. *Game Being* is a collaboration with Baden. Baden was trained at Gemini with the respect of materials that is the trademark of that press. Not long ago, during a residency in New Zealand, Benglis completed similar dynamic collaborations with other masters of different media. There she completed works in sprayed metal, beeswax, glass and terra cotta (*Lynda Benglis, from the Furnace*, Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland, 1993). At the University of North Texas, the collaboration with Stan Baden has resulted in a series of prints that speak to both the glories of printmaking as basis for fine art and to Benglis's own diverse and energized demands on materials. The University of North Texas PRINT Press embraces this type of collaboration. It seeks artists who are not necessarily printmakers to provide a new voice to their art.

Susan Noyes Platt, 1997