Lynda Benglis

New Work

Cheim & Read
547 West 25th Street, Chelsea
Through Oct. 22

Form is hindmost in Lynda Benglis’s impetuous, daredevil art. The improvised wall pieces in particular result from Ms. Benglis wrestling various materials, wet and dry, into a semblance of unity that seems to be either fragmentary or in a tumbling, twisting motion. Few artists have built on Process Art’s fidelity to forthright materials and methods with such exuberance.

This densely hung exhibition of new work revisits several series that Ms. Benglis developed in the 1970s and ‘80s, including her knots, columns and torsos, giving them a new expressive power. The pieces begin with chicken wire that is shaped and then covered with pieces of wet handmade paper, which creates a taut, irregular surface. Sometimes Ms. Benglis considers these plain pieces finished works, which isn’t always the case, although the best have the mute restraint of dressmakers’ muslins.

Usually, Ms. Benglis attacks the wire-paper construction with paint, glitter and “ground coal with matte medium,” which yields wonderful dry charcoal-like marks and smears. These more colorful works carry the show. Sometimes the forms suggest pairs of legs, and the paint has a hard, lacquer-like finish suggestive of insect shells. In others, there is a rewarding give and take among the paint, the ground coal and the exposed paper. In pieces like “Dressed to Kill,” “Look Back,” “Saddle Lane (Bull Path Series)” and especially “European Golden Plover,” improvisation prevails from start to finish, along with the sense of continued potential for this artist.

ROBERTA SMITH

Lynda Benglis’s “Look Back,” a piece made of handmade paper over chicken wire.