



**LESLEY BODZY**

**IS THIS DESIRE?**

## LESLEY BODZY

I am a sculptor and painter working in New York City and Houston. My body of work explores the ways in which materiality can give form and visibility to psychologically complex dimensions. Trauma, loss, and desire are recurring themes I approach through material processes as I devise a personal metaphorical language. My work is biographical in essence but my aesthetic language allows viewers to find their place among the bare narrative outlines that hold each piece together. My projects often involve series through which a loose narrative can be traced. Each takes on various forms intended to position the viewer as a witness as well as a co-author, creates new and unpredictable cycles of thoughts and associations, and provides an experimental opportunity to challenge one's assumptions and perspectives.

My practice is steeped in a genuine passion for materials and their expressive potential. I often let materials guide me through the creative process. Their malleability and resistance point me towards a subject that emerges as part of a meditative concentration—a tactile and open-ended dialogue that often results in a deeper reflection and comprehension of personal struggles. Manipulating, rearranging, and layering become gestural statements I perform to process events from the past and exorcise, through the material presence of the finished piece, their impact on the present.

The aesthetics that characterize my work are in part informed by the sculptural abstractism of the 1970s—especially the work of female pioneers like Lynda Benglis, Lynn Umlauf, and Merrill Wagner, artists that have been strong influences in my research. As a result of these influences, in my relationship with materials, I favor open form and ambiguities, privileging aesthetic solutions that gesture towards the imperfect and incomplete.

My minimalist aesthetics are often counterpointed by bold colors that dramatize each piece in order to attract the viewer's attention to what is often concealed or barely perceptible in our lives. Much of my practice thus revolves around the notion of monumentalizing the ephemeral through the creation of an idiosyncratic aesthetic language. It is in this context that my work can be seen to have a psychoanalytical/introspective edge. Some of my works are opportunities to reconsider "hard to come to terms with" circumstances, dramatic events, or fleeting/causal moments that nonetheless end up defining our personalities, our self-esteem, and our relationships with others.

I hold an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and have studied at Mount Holyoke College, Hunter College, and the Art Students League of New York. My work is represented by galleries in Saugerties, NY, Houston, TX, Williamsburg, VA, and Jersey City, NJ and it has been exhibited widely across the United States and abroad. Recent shows include Chashama and Sculptors Alliance in New York City. I also recently exhibited a selection of my work at Holy Art Gallery in London, UK, Site:Brooklyn, Emerge Gallery in Saugerties, NY, the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury, CT, the Susquehanna Art Museum in Harrisburg, PA, and the Meadows Gallery in Tyler, TX.





*...and I didn't say a thing*, 48 x 20 x 8 inches, 2021



**...and 3**  
10 x 12 inches  
each, 2021



***...when you didn't show up***  
6 feet 5 inches x 33 inches, 2021

## IS THIS DESIRE?

*The loneliness of feeling unseen by others is as fundamental a pain as physical injury, but it doesn't show on the outside. Emotional loneliness is a vague and private experience, not easy to see or describe. You might call it a feeling of emptiness or being alone in the world. [...] When children feel that their true selves aren't enough, they become something other than who they really are but the true self still exists beneath the surface.*

Lindsay Gibson, 2015

My most recent project, *Is This Desire?*, emerged from the passing of my father and the emotional labor that ensued. His hospitalization because of Covid-19, and the negotiation of a tense emergency situation with the rest of my family, reopened wounds and foregrounded feelings I had not experienced for decades. I found myself reflecting upon the devastating power of the throwaway comments and the dismissive glances that had defined my upbringing in subtle and yet fundamental ways. How gender implications and societal hostilities have led to the woman I am today, my fears, my anxieties, my tenaciousness.

With my father gone, I found that the only opportunity to renegotiate the terms of these subtle and yet traumatic circumstances lay exclusively between me and the materials of my art. Skins, membranes, shrouds, veils—each work emerges from the point in which language crumbles, and we struggle to grasp the meaning of our experiences. The gold draperies in *Is This Desire?* allude to the shiny veneer we each present to the world. Taught to play roles that please our parents and society throughout our childhood, our challenge as adults is to seek our true selves. The drapes are facades that conceal feelings and emotions we experience every day in the quietness of our own reflections. This series of works attempts to process and visualize the invisible pressures many girls of my generation endured while conforming to the golden standard of stereotypical femininity.

The works part of the *Is This Desire?* series draws from surrealism as much as 1970s abstract aesthetics developed by a host of female pioneer artists. Man Ray's *L'Enigme d'Isidore Ducasse*, 1920—a sewing machine wrapped in a blanket and tied in a string, or Meret Oppenheim's *Object*, 1936, in which fur wraps a teacup and saucer, piqued my curiosity. These works began to resound with the psychological depths I was grappling with, providing meaningful anchors through which the elusiveness of feelings could be grasped more fully. In *Is This Desire?* I found an opportunity to process a dimension of emotional neglect that I consider to be specifically female and perhaps even more closely linked to women of my generation who grew up in a very different world from that of today. It is in this context that this series can be seen to engage in conversation with Lynda Benglis's late 70s gold, wall-mounted sculptural pieces. Or that they share something with the more contemporary, wall-mounted, and standing sculptures by South African artist Nandipha Mntambo whose modeled cowhides also explore a feminine kind of vulnerability that often eludes words, or that remains invisible and unspoken.

In *Is This Desire?* I rework these influences into a personal aesthetic language in which emotional neglect is presented as an abstracted/unconscious entity that remains impossible to fully address but whose presence and power remain undeniable. Thin and yet resistant veils flaunt shiny golden surfaces that forever conceal the cause of resentments or delusions. Each work is the manifestation of a specific moment and the reminder of a process of undoing requiring forgiveness but also reminding me to never forget.



**Foreground: *...and I wasn't invited?***  
7 feet 4 inches x 9 feet 3 inches x 24 inches, 2021  
Installation shot at SAIC Galleries, 2021

### ***...and I didn't say a thing***

Growing up, I was fat.  
At 12, I weighed 200 pounds.  
“Get out of here, Fat,” my mother snapped,  
diapering my baby sister.  
Nasty. In the sun.  
Andy Williams crooned “Moon River”  
over the intercom.  
It was her favorite song.  
I always imagined my life would be perfect if  
I could cross a moon river in style  
someday.  
I dreamed then that someday I would leave  
and cross a moon river.

When I was 14, she picked me up from school.  
I was happy to avoid the bus and the teasing.  
Mom was so happy.  
“I just saw your brother’s teacher. She says he  
has the IQ of a genius!” I felt my heart drop.  
“I have all A’s,” I said.  
“You are an overachiever.”

Today, 55 years later,  
my dad lies all alone  
in the hospital with Covid.  
Mom snaps at me over the phone.  
“I don’t need a home health care worker,  
I’m fine!”

My 92-year-old dad is in the local hospital.  
He has been delirious with Covid for 13 days.  
Moaning,  
fighting the nurses, arms and legs flaying. He  
can’t talk or hear.

The pandemic means we can’t visit the  
hospital. The doctors talk to us by phone.  
We live in four different cities. They can only  
speak to one designated person per family.

My mother appoints my brother.  
“Your brother is the doctor in the family,”  
snaps my Mother, “so, he should talk to the  
doctors.”

(Fine, but I’m the smartest one.)

My sister cowers before her tone.  
My brother, (who is an osteopath) does not

take Covid seriously.  
He says it’s like the flu and  
all the hysteria is a plot by “Big Pharma.”

(He thinks 9/11 was a plot by “Big Oil and  
Bush.”)

My brother texts me and my sister after he  
gets information from the doctors. When we  
ask questions, he replies “Google it.”

In the real world, I am the most successful  
child.

But in the family,  
I will always be just another “girl child.”

Maybe all families keep the family drama in  
place long after the players have outgrown  
their roles.

My sister and I call the nurses.  
The nurses, who watch over dad 24/7, know  
more than the doctors,  
who travel from hospital to hospital, visiting  
Covid wards packed to the gills. California is in  
lockdown now.

The ICU nurses are amazing,  
a gift from God.  
Brave creatures.  
They sound Slavic over the phone. “Where are  
you from?” I ask. “Kiev.” “Moscow.” “Sofia.”

I ask if they are Jewish. Some are.  
My Dad is a lawyer,  
he helped save the Soviet Jews,”  
I say, seeking to bond,  
hoping to motivate them  
to care for an old man  
all alone in an overcrowded hospital during a  
global pandemic.

The vaccine is coming soon.  
It won’t save my dad.



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