

Artsy

Morse, Jed: Catching Up with Liz Larner

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Los Angeles-based artist Liz Larner was one of the 10 artists featured in *Nasher XChange*, the citywide exhibition of art in the public realm organized by the Nasher Sculpture Center in celebration of its 10th anniversary in 2013. Her contribution, *X*, was installed in the courtyard of the new Edith O'Donnell Arts and Technology Building at the University of Texas at Dallas. Consisting of two curving, stainless-steel planes that intersect near the apex of the arch and subtly define an interior volume, the work served as a fitting symbol for the university program established to examine the intersection of these two disciplines. It also continued the artist's exploration of irregular geometries and deceptively simple sculptural forms. Chief Curator Jed Morse spoke with Larner recently about what she has been working on since *Nasher XChange*, including seeing *X* exhibited in other locations, an exhibition of her ceramic works, a GSA commission, and the editioned work she is making to help support the Nasher Sculpture Center.

NASHER SCULPTURE CENTER

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Liz Larner, *X*, 2013, Stainless steel, Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles, Installation view at Aspen Art Museum, November 6, 2015 - November 30, 2016

Jed Morse: I wanted to talk a little bit about what you have been doing since *Nasher XChange*. You've just opened a big exhibition of your ceramics at the Aspen Art Museum and *X* has been there since the fall. Is that right?

Liz Lerner: That's right. Shigeru Ban's woven screen in front of the Aspen Art Museum is an amazing site to be able to locate *X*. I love it in when a large piece like *X* can travel to different places. Especially with that surface, it really holds the past places that it's been, at least for me. It takes onto the surface this other place, and that's been really fun moving it around. It was in Chicago [at the Art Institute of Chicago, April 24 – September 27, 2015] and The second *X* is now part of the Walker Art Center Collection in Minneapolis.

JM: Oh, that's great.

LL: A book on the wall ceramics was published and ready for the opening at the AAM. And in June of 2015 I finished a permanent sculpture that was commissioned by the GSA [U.S. General Services Administration] in Denver. It's on the plaza of the federal building and the federal courthouse in downtown Denver.

JM: What did you do there?

LL: The title of the work is *Public Jewel*. I collected stones and minerals from all over Colorado and brought them together to make an agglomerate boulder. It is held up about 13 feet in the air by a bronze structure, so it's kind of like a gate and a geologic totem in a way. The bronze aspect is an open form that can be walked through, one can look up at the agglomerate boulder when under it, and once inside and up in the buildings, there are amazing views from above.



Installation view of Liz Lerner, exhibition of ceramics at the Aspen Art Museum, February 26 - June 5, 2016

JM: It has to be interesting to see so many of the ceramic works in the same space, or together in the catalogue—to be able to look at that body of work in its totality. Were there things that surprised you about it as a body of work?

LL: It's great to see things that have happened over time. You become informed about something that maybe you didn't think of before. And for me, I've begun letting the process happen more without making changes to the slabs besides laying the clay over forms, and allowing the drying process to take its course. It's interesting for me to see the earlier work: those pieces I was squaring up the edges and doing a lot more to make them into rectangles. Now I'm just allowing these ovals that come through the slab roller be, but after seeing the installation at the AAM, I'm realizing that the more geometric forms accentuate the cracked ovals and visa versa. It's made me go back to an earlier working process a little bit because I have a show coming up in September in Berlin at Max Hetzler Gallery and am starting to incorporate some of the more rectilinear forms with the more organic forms. There's a lot of variation in the color and its application, so getting to see that again was very helpful to my approach and what I want to do next.

JM: The coatings seem incredibly complex. How have the coatings evolved since you started doing these?

LL: There's a funny thing that happened during the process of making the agglomerate boulder for *Public Jewel*, while at the same time working on the ceramics: I had a lot of cast-offs from the process of cutting and selecting the stones. One day, out of curiosity, I brought some of these over to the ceramic studio and pressed them into the surface of the clay and then fired that just to see what would happen. It was a happy accident. So I've started incorporating some of these [stones] into the surface [of the ceramics] and glazing these works. These larger pieces of stone are functioning against scale, like blown-up pigment particles. Before I started using glaze, I was only using epoxy with pigment that I mix in. When thinking about pigment and what it is, ideas about the Anthropocene and the geologic, the changeover from geology to humans as the force of change on a planet come to mind. Gemstones and minerals for pigment all come from underground, where it's completely dark, yet these incredible colors are found there, and we dig them up and put them on our art. My understanding of how the pigment works with the flow of epoxy and how uniquely each pigment reacts is deepening. It's not just the color that's different, it's the texture, and how, combined with the epoxy, the pigments move through or cling to the topography of the ceramic. Each pigment has its own character, so that movement combined with that topography and gravitational pull is really evident on and through the surface.



Liz Larner, *Lux Interior* (gold plated), 2010. Bronze with gold patina, 11 x 8 1/2 x 6 in. (27.9 x 12.6 x 15.2 cm).
Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles.

JM: We're really excited about the edition you did for us. It looks fantastic.

LL: Yeah, I can't wait for you to see it in person. The photos are deceptive, which I always think is a good thing in sculpture. It's about the power of sculpture, too. I think it's much more interesting to not have an image of it be a foregone conclusion when you're with the sculpture.

JM: There haven't been a number of works you've done in that kind of high-polished stainless steel. Are these the only two: the Nasher edition and X?

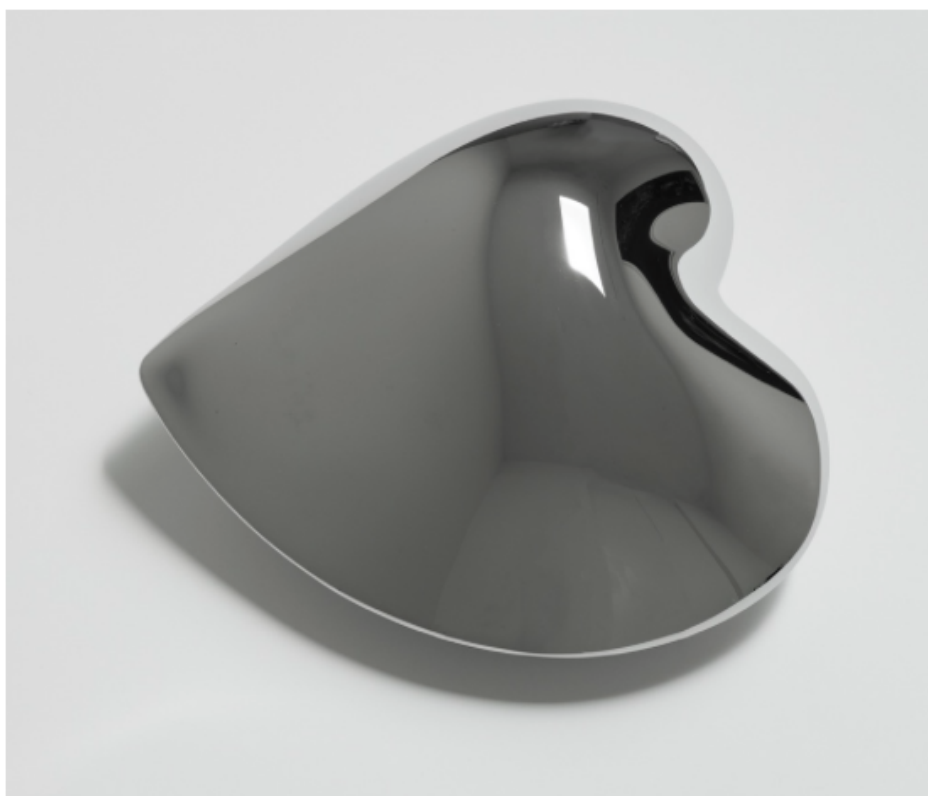
LL: These are the only two.

JM: Oh, that's fascinating. Is there something about the form that drew you to stainless steel?

LL: I think of *yes this too* as an intimate piece, part of a household. The thing that I like about the mirror-polished stainless steel is how it reflects everything that's happening, with an impact of the form on that reflection. So, [the work] reflects the individuality of what's happening in the present as it is reflected on a surface that has its own form. It's like this constant feedback of whatever is going on at the moment. It's always captured in the surface, but also inflected by it. You know, sometimes with the reflection, it's like the form almost disappears, but it's still evident in the distortion of the reflection.

JM: The edition is intimately scaled, so it seems like it's meant to be held.

LL: It's a little bit big to hold. You would need both hands. *Lux Interior* was another heart shape, a softened triangle. I became interested in that a few years ago when so many skulls were being produced. I wanted to make a heart.



Liz Larner, *yes this too*, 2015. 3 1/2 x 8 x 9 in (8.9 x 20.3 x 22.9 cm). Edition of 20, +3 AP. Commissioned to support the Nasher Sculpture Center.

JM: Is it solid or is it plate steel that has been molded and welded?

LL: No, it was cast. It's kind of an interesting process. We're doing it at the Walla Walla Foundry. They're doing such amazing things. It's a form that was modeled digitally.

JM: Is it solid?

LL: No, it's hollow.

JM: But it's dense, so it's substantial.

LL: Yes, the most delicate thing about it is the mirror polish, but that can be brought back. The form in this material is very resilient. And another aspect about this sculpture is that it can be flipped. You can turn it on different sides and it has a very different read on each side. It's a real 3-D sculpture that can be manipulated. You can turn it around, or have a completely different view of it. It doesn't have a set place to be. In this way it is like another edition that I made some years ago, *Guest*.

JM: It's of a scale where it doesn't necessarily need a pedestal. It's meant to be a part of your space.

LL: Exactly. And it's meant to be touched. Of course, the surface is sensitive because it's mirror-polished, but it can be held, it can be moved around or turned over, and moved from place to place.

I must admit that I did make a tiny version of it, a small handheld version out of solid cast silver, which is a private edition that I made for my wedding and I gave to family and dear friends as gifts. But I wanted to use this form again. I just thought it was perfect for this edition because as a digital model it can be made in any scale, but I wanted it to still be intimate.

JM: That's really a lovely association.

LL: I love the Nasher and the people of Dallas that I've met. I made this for them.