

Linda Lighton Lecture

Hi, My name is Linda Lighton. I am happy to be here with you today to tell you about my work.

First, a little background: My grandmother was an artist, art dealer and interior designer. In the 1930's she bought a house of prostitution and bar, called the Bloody Bucket. She moved out all the girls and moved in artists in the rooms upstairs.

Downstairs she had a gallery and salon and tearoom. Granny ran a bread line out of that gallery during the 30's depression.

Granny had a lot of ceramics and maybe 70 sets of dishes. Here is one I inherited: Spode, with place settings for 20 including demitasse, finger bowls and more.

I always wanted to be an artist however my parents thought it was too bohemian a lifestyle for their daughter. They always said you could marry more money in 5 minutes than you could make in a lifetime! They sent me to a liberal arts school in New Jersey, 1966. The only saving grace was that it was just outside of New York. The Pop Art Movement was under way and Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenberg and Roy Lichtenstein made a huge impression on me.

I dropped out of school as the art department wasn't much and moved to Lawrence Kansas where I helped to put out an underground newspaper called "the Screw, a twisted device for holding things together". We

Interviewed the first draft dodger behind a sheet. By 1968 my

husband and I moved to Haight for a couple of years and then on to Seattle. We had a daughter, Rose. By 1972 I was in School at the factory of Visual Arts. Howard Kottler was teaching at U of W. and some of the marvelous grad students he had came over to teach at the Factory: Mark Burns, Patti Warashina, Margaret Ford and David Furman.

At the Factory I began making pots but they were always embellished. I started as a painter and my goal has always been fine art.

I love being out in nature, plants, gardening, growing food and the medicinal aspects of plants. I moved with a group of people to the Colville Indian reservation in Eastern Washington to live communally for a couple of years. I thought I could live my life as a piece of art. There was no running water or electricity. We dug wells, grew our own food, raised animals, hunted and tanned hides even made soap! We danced war dances with the Indians and I built an 8-sided log house with my friend using almost all hand tools. Dragged all standing dead timber with a horse. I found that living your life as art leaves little time for making any art. I moved to Bellingham, Wa., then, to Idaho and worked out of the university till I could afford a kiln. Gradually the function started sliding away.

I married and built a house in Northern Idaho. Fun!!! This wing cost us \$7000.00! So my daughter is growing and you have different concerns. I was questioning my role as a mother and

wife. Might as well make work about it. This was a show called," And she did not live happily ever after, but she did live!" Separation is not clearly defined. This was a search for new meanings and purpose. About transitions, which I find most of my work is about. I like for the art to speak about life over the knowledge of art.

Cities are defined by their architecture. They have personalities. People are defined by their demeanor, their personality and their habits. These can be confining, a kind of entrapment. Manners, self control and appearances don't reveal the inner person. We must contain ourselves. Above all make the world predictable, no surprises. We talk about spontaneity but we crave conformity. Some people are bound so tightly by their habits and the mores of society that they become institutionalized. They are bricked into the death throes of our culture by the trappings, strappings of society. It is neat, tidy, a tight operation. It is predictable, confined, defined, but is it worth it? Our homes and apartments can be a place of refuge or a prison, our urban armaments.

Here I have used the figure as a vehicle for my ideas. I want to work directly with life issues, it's everydayness, it's greatness, the ups and downs. I want to capture in an instant, a moment of passion and stress. These figures are tough, strong survivors; the stuff of humanity, where sorrow is often as evident and meaningful as joy. Perhaps sorrow gives

one the capacity to empathize.

There is a physicality to this work. It is substantial. I don't fuss over it with my hands. I use only a few tools, such as a 2x4, a knife and a cheese cutter. I beat and batter the work furiously. I slash and bash it into shape. The pieces are conceived in violence. The figures show strength, the courage to move forward, and hope. In spite of oppression, humanity survives.

Elie Weisel says, "Despite pain and sorrow we'll put our trust in what exalts us." We all have many hardships, indignities and frailties in our lives.

Now I want to turn away from soul baring, self indulgence and meanness of the human condition. I want to make my art gorgeous and well crafted. Sensuality is it's own reward.

I have lived in this world and feel the need to laugh and reveal some of the vulgarity in life. I know that sex is a driving force and must be acknowledged as such.

My focus has been on desire. How would I visualize desire, the life force: a dangerous beauty entailing seduction, sexual prowess and moaning hormones. I want to celebrate the spirit of life. The work two-stepping towards figuration, beckoning the viewer to come closer, come hither. Oh my God, have I gone over the line? Is this Baroque-a-go-go? I wish my work to have colors as soft and slippery as a satin quilt. Taste

the effervescent tingle of pink. Succulent!

Elizabeth Kirsch in Review magazine says, “The majority of these entities are hermaphrodites sprouting cavernous vulva and tumescent penises all in one self contained cheerful organism. They beckon seductively to anyone who comes near to slurp one down whole! If Rupaul could be a ceramic sculpture she/he would want to incarnate as one of Lighton’s Diva’s.”

I am very aware of my senses. Color, smell, taste are divine energy forces, as well as movement. Sometimes I can smell color. I have been making scents for my shows recently, and music too. I have tried to make my work smell: oysters, seaweed, the salty metallic taste of blood and rusted iron are scents I have in mind. I have sensations of softness, creaminess, dryness, just from the colors. So color has great meaning for me.

I must shovel to my core, which must include female imagery, to be honest and sincere. I try to be earnest and without cynicism. I want my works to tell their story cogently and clearly which can only be done by picking the right color, layering it into existence: the depth of a plum red, the languid pulsing of purple, the lustful heat and dank smell of moldering red, pulsing blood and muscle underneath. The satin quilted lofted softness of creamy peach, with just a bit of tartness.

I have had the privilege of focusing on Luminosity. Luminosity is light from within. I believe it is the perfect antidote to this environment where we are consumed with this recession and the heaviness of war. It is the opportunity to explore the light within each of us. I am imagining this light as a moment without aggression. It emanates calmness and a quiet goodness, not hot, but the last moment before sleep or death. These clay fuchsias are a limpid kind of flower. They hang in the air, facing downward, ready to kiss the earth. They appear ready to drop their petals, blown out at the end of their time. This is a conversation about a tipping point in life, not birth or sex or middle age: it is about the fragility of life: The beginning of the last chapter. This is a world that needs to be recognized and a conversation that needs to ensue. I hope the viewing will transport the audience to a contemplative, dreamy place to escape the mundane and consider the ethereal and ephemeral.

I have been worried over the proliferation of guns and the longing for gasoline and oil in our country. I wanted to do and say something addressing these grave issues. There are 270 million guns in this country! That is, 50 million more guns than every man woman and child! ? With this statistic we should be the safest country on earth!

A profusion of guns has not made us safer, or more civil. It has not strengthened our institutions but is destroying them.

We are one of the most violent countries on the planet. I think a dialogue needs to ensue over this. There have been more than 239 School Shootings since Sandy Hook instead of protecting the sanctity of the classroom, public officials in 30 states introduced bills permitting the arming of teachers.

Why has the US refused to act in a responsible way? May have to do with the gun lobby which is very strong in our country. Much of our gun legislation has been written by gun lobbyists.

The firearms industry is a billion dollar industry. Big money, involved in the manufacture and sale of guns and ammunition, is corrupting our democratic institutions.

Oil is intermingled with finances and the violence problem in the world today. Almost all (90%) gun violence in Canada and Mexico is with guns purchased illegally from the United States.

Education and Civil Discourse is the backbone of our democracy. Democracy demands civics and civility, which leads to civil discourse. This is how we have civilization. Really, I don't believe you can have Democracy at the end of a gun!

I would like to see more safety regulations and education around guns. A felon can buy a gun within an hour of getting out of prison in many states, since the laws on guns have been given to states.

Firearm deaths in the US in 1995 was 14 per 100,000, in Europe the number is 3, in Canada a country with as many guns the number is 4 and in Australia the number is 2.5. Firearm deaths for children under the age of 15 is 10 times higher in the US than in any other nation in the Western world. If you own a gun you are 10 times more likely to be involved in a homicide.

There is a fearsome idea that we all must be armed to protect ourselves from our fellow citizens. Being armed makes it 10 times more likely that an accident with a gun will happen. The statistics show us that more handguns do not make us safer. Handguns are for killing people I personally do not want the responsibility of killing someone. Really, I do not want your heart to kiss a bullet.

Whatever happened to civil discourse? When will we decide to take the moral and rationale stance?

An artist's job is to visualize what is happening in society. The country that I want is not the country that I have. These pieces are an open invitation for a conversation about this very loaded topic.

When I made "44 Magnum Mandala" I thought, my god, we have begun a meditation on guns, we worship the gun.

The art critic, Tanya Hartman, said of this piece: "I Don't Want a Bullet to Kiss your Heart," "It is an arc, a majestic

portal, evocative of the architecture of tyranny, like a triumphal Arch. How are tyrants raised up? Through fear, supported by violence. It is an arch and if we pass under it we enter chaos. It is a doorway leading to anarchy and tyranny. Do we want to go through it?”

I am interested in how guns are viewed in our culture. My work has always addressed questions of power, gender, and desire, which are integral aspects of gun violence. In this series, I hope I've captured the repellant and seductive nature of violence. I question these ethics and morals. Testosterone is a driving force here. Are we actually protecting ourselves with firearms? This work is a plea to think with your heart and your brain and not with a lethal weapon.

I search for the justifiable change, embrace it and know it is imperative. Believing in mankind, I hope to nudge the change for a more positive future

Joy Is an Action Verb

Right now, I need to find out what joy is.

So, I am doing the research.

Is it color? Smell? Taste? Laughter?

Is it not having to do anything?

A walk in the woods?

God?

I think it is fleeting. You get it, feel it in your body,
a lightness.

It is often momentary. You've got it and then it is gone.

Can we sustain it? Do we want to?

Can you give it away?

Joy is from the earth, full of color and lightness.

It is an instantaneous flush in your cheeks,
an orgasm.

Can you get it to last longer? Does it take practice?

The search continues.

Linda Lighton