

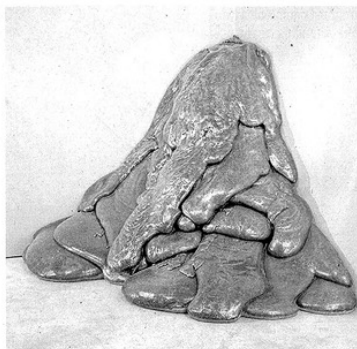
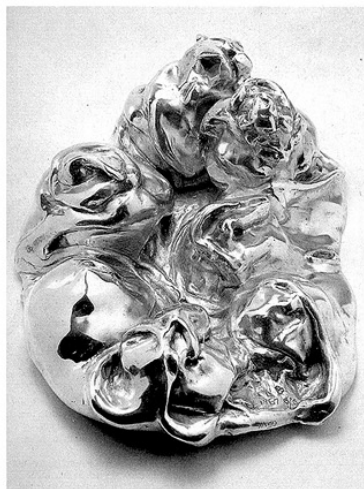
# CHEIM & READ

E27 N

FRIDAY, JULY 13, 2007

**WEEKEND Arts** FINE ARTS  
LEISURE

The New York Times



Left, "End of Softness," by Louise Bourgeois, and above, "Quartered Meteor," by Lynda Benglis, both from a show at Cheim & Read. Although born 30 years apart, the two artists for a short time in the late '60s and early '70s produced radical and complementary work.

Photographs from Cheim & Read

## 'Circa 70'

Lynda Benglis and  
Louise Bourgeois

*Cheim & Read*  
547 West 25th Street, Chelsea  
Through Aug. 31

It says something about the phlegmatic pulse of current art that one of the few striking sights in Chelsea so far this summer is a show of mostly seen-before sculpture made more than three decades ago by two artists in the exhibiting gallery's stable. Louise Bourgeois and Lynda Benglis were born 30 years apart. But for a short while in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they were producing radical and complementary work.

At the time, Post-Minimalism — more accurately, counter-Minimalism — was being advertised as the latest defining style. The name was really a blanket label for various forms of art that had internalized and been shaped by the mold-breaking liberationist energies of the 1960s. And no energy was more forceful than that generated by the women's movement, which was coming to a boil during the time most of the work in the show was being made.

By 1970, however, Ms. Bourgeois was already a one-woman vanguard, having developed, decades earlier, a radically gendered art, body-based, autobiographically inflected. Well in advance of Minimalism she created its opposite: an expressive, metaphor-rich, mock-organic, reverse-monumental abstract sculpture. Few people knew of it, though.

Museums ignored Ms. Bourgeois. In his 20 years as a critic, the Minimalist sculptor Donald Judd, who prided himself on his adventurous eye, didn't mention her once, though her fleshy, sexually mocking work was at least as challenging of art-establishment codes and conventions as his own.

Such challenges were a prime stimulus for Ms. Benglis's cast-metal sculptures from the same period. Several bear a family resemblance to Ms. Bourgeois's. But as the art historian Robert Pincus-Witten suggests in an exhibition essay, they were very different.

Ms. Bourgeois's art was fundamentally private, the subconscious its source; Ms. Benglis's work was brashly extroverted, a sardonic and competitive response to other contemporary art.

In 1968 Richard Serra pinned a sheet of lead to the wall with a pole, defying gravity and earning a round of heavyweight applause. In 1969 Ms. Benglis piled thick, blubbery, gravity-endorsing slabs of the same material on a gallery floor without raising a critical stir. That would come a few years later, in 1974, when she bought advertising space in *Artforum* and filled it with a photograph of herself, nude, buff, wearing cool shades and holding a dildo between her legs.

The result was a succès de scandale that touched a raw feminist nerve, threw inveterately sleazy art-world politics into relief, and caused permanent editorial rifts at *Artforum* itself. It's impossible to imagine such passion being roused over anything in Chelsea today, though at least a spark of it lingers in this historical sizzler of a summer show.

HOLLAND COTTER

547 WEST 25 STREET NEW YORK NY 10001 TEL 212 242 7727

FAX 212 242 7737 GALLERY@CHEIMREAD.COM