

Press Release

Liz Larner A hard line to bend 11 Sep 2026–17 Jan 2027

Liz Larner, *Marthe*, 2019. Ceramic, epoxy. 22 x 35 x 11 inches (55.9 x 88.9 x 27.9 cm). Photo: Evan Bedford. © Liz Larner, Courtesy Galerie Max Hetzler, Anton Kern Gallery, The Modern Institute, Regen Projects



Camden Art Centre is pleased to announce the first institutional exhibition in the UK of American artist Liz Larner (b. 1960, Sacramento, California), one of the most important artists to emerge from the West Coast and, specifically, the Los Angeles art scene of the late 1980s. Following Larner's career survey *Don't Put It Back Like It Was* at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and SculptureCenter, New York, as well as her solo exhibition *below above* at Kunsthalle Zürich (all 2022), this major solo exhibition centres on the artist's current thinking and concerns, bringing together a carefully selected group of works, primarily from the last decade.

Larner's practice engages material and metaphysical concerns. Her elegant formal experimentation is informed by ideas from literature and philosophy, as well as processes in biology, geology and the mineral kingdom. The artist's intuitive approach to materials is an antidote to notions of the Anthropocene, addressing the need for something that's organic, nurturing, experienced, alive and continually becoming.

The exhibition at Camden Art Centre is envisioned as a series of rooms, each progressing core ideas (from mythology and cosmology to cycles of matter as it transforms into the vegetal, animal and mineral) through varying formal emphases and poetic relationships. Inclined towards post-human and eco-feminist thought, Larner enacts wide-ranging formal expressions using clay, metal, wood and plastic to reflect on our embodied reality and how we participate and intervene in wider material cycles. The works on display demonstrate the breadth and diversity in Larner's practice – her virtuosic capacity ranging between mediums and techniques, and her encyclopaedic ability to express ideas beyond material.

A significant new mixed-media sculpture made especially for the exhibition draws from Jewish folklore and Mesopotamian mythology: the legendary female figure Lilith – Adam's other half, created as his equal by God, who refused subservience and chose to leave the Garden of Eden. She has come to signify woman's creative force. *A hard line to bend* (2026) takes inspiration from a 19th century BCE Babylonian clay relief in the British Museum that depicts Lilith with wings, owl legs and talons, flanked by two owls. Larner's sculpture combines madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*), a dense, heavy hardwood, prevalent in the Pacific Northwest where the artist has her studio; polished formed bronze; a cast bronze hand with a patina and partial polish; and an owl's leg and foot etched with patterns taken from cedar sprays. Her portrait of Lilith emerges through differing forms, materials and surfaces that comprise the sculpture.

The exhibition foregrounds Larner's long-standing engagement with ceramics, a medium she turned to in the late 1990s which has become increasingly present over recent years. Her earliest ceramic series, *Smiles* (1996–2011), are slip-cast in porcelain from foam-core models, comprised of geometric forms generally curving upward to resemble a smile. These cryptic glyphs are often humorous matrices of human emotion and expression, inspired by literary descriptions from John Gregory Dunne's novel *The Red White and Blue* (1987), ranging from a "luminous, loony smile", to a "languid" or "executioner's" smile, as well as Mark Twain's litany of smile modifiers from his short story *The Million Pound Bank Note* (1893).

Since 2010, Larner has produced an ongoing series of wall-mounted ceramic slabs, often in roughly oval or rectilinear shapes. Embracing a permissive attitude towards the natural behaviour of the clay as it dries and is fired, Larner's ceramic topographies are fissured, and comprise various fractures, breaks and textured effects. Constructed by draping slabs of clay over an undisclosed underlay, the forms become sites of experimentation in colour and eschew categorisation: both painting and sculpture, image and object, their palpable properties assert themselves into material reality. Larner often titles these works with poetic allusions to the geological – mantle, calefaction, subduction – and related literary concepts such as caesura, meaning a pause or break, and inflexion, the grammatical modulation of voice and the geological expression of convex or concave form.

In 2014, as Larner's experimentation with the slabs progressed, she began the 'calefaction' category, melting semi-precious stones and metals into the glaze and ceramic in the firing process – like time capsules, their properties are the products of deep transformation across aeons. In more recent slab works, Larner has added a highly polished metal structure to attach the ceramics to the wall, revealing the reverse of the ceramic form, the interstitial space between sculpture and wall, and creating illusion and reflection through light and time.

Elsewhere in the exhibition, a group of sculptures from Larner's ceramic *Asteroids* series (2020–ongoing) is brought into dialogue with assemblages made with discarded, single-use plastics. Seemingly unrelated, they both come from ancient matter, whether it be plant, animal or mineral. Larner's plastic series upcycles waste to aesthetic form, reframing the industrial impact humanity has on the wider world, and the legacy of what we produce, as part of a larger, organic and interconnected whole. The asteroids make direct reference to the 'space rocks' orbiting the sun that have been named after classical mythological figures since the first asteroid, Ceres, was discovered in 1801.

Quotes

Artist Liz Larner said: "It is gratifying and meaningful for me to be able to have this exhibition at Camden Art Centre in 2026, as I find myself in a very British time of my life – in April the King of England addressed the US Congress, Judiciary and President, reminding them of the importance of checks and balances. I am quite thrilled that the brilliant British writer Joanna Kavenna has agreed to write about my art for Camden Art Centre's much-admired File Notes. I would like to thank the curators of this exhibition, Martin Clark and Gina Buenfeld-Murley, for their insightful and engaged attention during the process of bringing this exhibition to Camden and to the wonderful art galleries that support and represent my work and the very gracious donors to this exhibition. Gramercy!"

Martin Clark, Director of Camden Art Centre, said: "I am thrilled to be presenting this long-overdue institutional exhibition of Larner's work in the UK. She is one of the most important and influential artists and thinkers of her generation – someone who has, over more than four decades, fearlessly foregrounded both material innovation and an increasingly timely and vital ecological, feminist and post-human position."

File Note

A new essay by celebrated novelist Joanna Kavenna is published in the latest edition of Camden Art Centre's long-running File Note series. Produced for every exhibition, the series is an important strand of the organisation's programme, providing a newly commissioned piece of long-form writing on the exhibiting artist accompanied by reading, listening and watching lists. The File Notes are an accessible resource, available in print from Camden Art Centre's onsite and online shop (£2), and for free online on Camden Art Centre's website.

Credits

This exhibition is made possible through headline support from Alex Hank; the generous support of Galerie Max Hetzler, Anton Kern Gallery, The Modern Institute, Regen Projects, Karen Hillenburg, the Camden Art Centre Artists' Circle, and those who wish to remain anonymous.

Notes to editors

For further information, interviews and images please contact:

Mary Doherty // mary@sam-talbot.com

Rebecca Lally // rebecca@sam-talbot.com

Camden Art Centre

Since 1965 Camden Art Centre has been a place for art and the people that make it. Rooted in our local community and internationally acclaimed, we foster a sense of belonging and a deeper relationship to art. We aim to push boundaries and connect people to their own creativity through our exhibitions, residencies, events and learning programmes. Originally built as a public library, the building now combines historic architecture with open, modern spaces and a secluded garden with free entry for all. Camden Art Centre has always led the way supporting artists and audiences to create and engage with the most vital and inspiring contemporary art and culture today.

Liz Larner Biography

Liz Larner (b. 1960, Sacramento, California) lives in Bellingham, WA. Internationally acclaimed for her materially adventurous and conceptually driven sculptural practice, often interrogating form, surface, spatial dynamics, and the body's relation to matter, Larner's use of diverse materials – resin, metals, stone, ceramics, and even bacterial cultures – has placed her at the forefront of post-minimal and feminist approaches to sculpture.

Larner has exhibited widely at prestigious institutions, including Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Art Institute of Chicago; Aspen Art Museum, Colorado; Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna; Orange County Museum of Art, California; Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada; and Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland. One of her most significant solo exhibitions, *Don't Put It Back Like It Was*, was held at the Walker Art Center and SculptureCenter in 2022, offering a comprehensive survey of her career. A recipient of numerous accolades, including a Guggenheim Fellowship and the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, Larner continues to influence contemporary sculpture with her fearless experimentation and intellectual rigour. Larner is represented by Regen Projects, Galerie Max Hetzler, Anton Kern, and The Modern Institute.

Her work is represented in the collections of a number of internationally renowned institutions, including: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; SFMoMA, San Francisco; Art Institute of Chicago; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Dallas Museum of Art; Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C.; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; MAK-Austrian Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna; Fonds national d'art contemporain, Puteaux; Kunsthaus Zürich; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; among others.