Lynda Benglis and Robert Morris
SUSAN INGLETT GALLERY

Some art-world controversies never get old. Lynda Benglis's November 1974 *Artforum* advertisement for her exhibition at Paula Cooper Gallery remains a contender for the most persistently demanding of attention. Lesser known, perhaps, is the image that sparked her ad: Robert Morris's April 1974 poster for his Castelli-Sonnabend show. Yet these iconic plays on gender—Morris, buff in chains, and Benglis, in the buff with dildo—offer just a slice of the pie, similar to the ensuing story of the editors at this magazine who objected to Benglis's "centerfold," two of whom, Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson, defected to establish *October*. This intelligent show, curated by Specific Object's David Platzker, aimed to redress the familiar weighting of the narrative with a selection of contextualizing materials and accounts from 1973 and 1974, including magazine and newspaper articles, works by both artists, and, most significantly, thirty-seven unpublished letters from various parties to *Artforum* (from Benglis's archive), which made their public debut here.

Some of the letters mirrored the views of the five *Artforum* editors who published a disavowal in the December 1974 of the magazine deploring the image as an "object of extreme vulgarity" and were miffed that—as a paid ad—it skirted their objections to its inclusion as editorial content in conjunction with an article about Benglis by Robert Pincus-Witten. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe dubbed the image "flabby opportunism." Arlene Raven and Beth Iskin said it "illustrated . . . inescapable self-promotion and self-prostitution." A handful of school principals and librarians requested their subscriptions be canceled. A few letters were encouraging, however: A telegram from Vito Acconci, Jennifer Bartlett, Germano Celant, and Nancy Kitchel applauded Benglis's "way of bypassing editorial censorship." Elizabeth Murray wrote that she was "astonished that intelligent critics . . . could not get past their 'taste' enough to realize that they are blocking . . . freedom." The magazine spreads on view included Lucy Lippard's October 1975 article in *Ms.* ("A group of *Artforum* editors played into Benglis's hands.") and other published correspondence with *Artforum*, such as

Lynda Benglis, *Smile*, 1974, cast lead, 15½ x 6½ x 2¼".

Peter Plagens's tongue-in-cheek proposal that his fellow editors might cover "the offensive anatomy with a small Don Judd inset."

Other fascinating pieces of ephemera were scattered throughout the exhibition. An article from the February 1975 issue of *New York* described how the artist had made fifty T-shirts with her famed image on it, half of which were to be sold in order to recoup the costs of taking out the ad. Additionally, there was a "model contract" from an advertising agent named Roberta Kimmel, disclosing, "Benglis owns all rights to the photograph." A few works rounded out the show: Benglis's cast-lead sculpture of her double dildo, *Smile*, 1974, was in a vitrine above the reception desk, and her 1972 video *Mumble* was in the main gallery among the printed matter. Morris's 1973 video *Exchange*, made in response to the latter, was also installed nearby.

While Platzker's exhibition interestingly brought artists' ads and ephemera into a broader discussion, the other subjects raised by the show—the strong and differing reactions to feminism, representations of the body, and objectification—would have benefited from a little more room. The issues of gender and identity that Benglis's ad provokes might have been more fully explored, for example, if drawn into dialogue with the centerfolds commissioned from Cindy Sherman for *Artforum* in 1981. Likewise, Hannah Wilke's 1977 *Marxism and Art: Beware of Fascist Feminism* poster would have offered an interesting riposte to Raven and Iskin's letter. Nevertheless, this exhibition showed that a little dedication to archival research goes a long way, and it was refreshing to see someone bringing such rigorous historical examination to a noninstitutional context.

—*Lauren O'Neill-Butler*