



GILLIAN LOWNDES The Sunday Painter, London, UK

To call Gillian Lowndes a potter is a bit like calling Neil Armstrong a pilot: true, as far as it goes, but somehow missing the bigger picture. Lowndes, who died in 2010, did bewitching, unexpected things to clay, wrapping it around, under and through other matter to transform it into sculptures that seem utterly alien and compellingly organic. At *The Sunday Painter*, 21 such haunted forms are simply and sparingly displayed – hanging from the walls or presented on low, square, laboratory-white plinths, like the mysterious relics of a Tolkien-imagined past or artefacts dredged up from the ocean floor.

Occasional elements are recognizable – a metal whisk whose blackened fronds resemble those of whip; a bulldog clip; a fork with distended tines. These are fused using clay, slip or nichrome wire, often to fragments of earlier ceramic objects, which have been fired, smashed and re-imagined, as in the surrealist game of *cadavre exquis*. The overall effect, however, less recalls Dr Frankenstein's monster than it does the gradual spread of a moss carpet over an old wooden bench or the barnacled crust of a ship's chain. Scarred by the red-hot, lightning alchemy of the kiln, Lowndes's work nevertheless communicates a more

gradual, entropic kind of transformation. Paired on one plinth, you might imagine the tangled-ribbon forms of *For Jenny* (1990–94) and *Mesh Collage with Loofah and Hooks* (1991) as tumbleweeds blowing across abandoned industrial sites in an apocalyptic, if no longer imaginable, future of spreading deserts and rising seas.

They have an awkward temporality, these objects: they seem ancient and primally animistic yet, as artworks, they feel wonderfully fresh. In their wild material experimentation and utter disregard for the niceties of the ceramic medium and the discourses of craft and function around it, they prefigure the work of any number of young artists currently working in clay. (Aaron Angell, who wrote a text for the exhibition, is one obvious example.) However, a more interesting echo, from *The Sunday Painter's* own artist-list, might be found in the work of someone like Samara Scott, who shares Lowndes's lint-roller approach to collecting the detritus of contemporary life. (For precursors, we need look no further than the Robert Rauschenberg retrospective up the road at Tate Modern.)

The earliest work in this exhibition dates from 1981, not longer after Lowndes's return from Nigeria, where she spent a period living with her partner, the ceramist Ian Auld, in the late 1970s. Lowndes studied at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London in the mid-1950s, on the ceramics course, first under Dora Billington and then Gilbert Harding Green. The collector-gallerist Henry Rothschild was an early champion of her work and she exhibited at his Sloane Street space, Primavera, in the 1960s. However, the 18 months Lowndes spent in Nigeria proved transformative. Inspired by Yoruba craft traditions – the incorporation of multiple materials in a single artefact, the expediency and improvisation of their pottery techniques – Lowndes abandoned ceramic convention for uncharted sculptural waters.

The critic Tanya Harrod wrote about Lowndes's 'impatience with clay' upon her return from Africa: across the works in this exhibition you see her pushing her material to its extreme, to the point at which it no longer resembles itself. (In this she exploits clay's historical facility in impersonating other materials, including copper, jade and marble.) We might understand this impatience in another way, too: for all of Lowndes's thrilling originality, this small but perfectly formed show in a young Peckham gallery is the largest exhibition of her work in London for two decades. *The Sunday Painter*, to their great credit, have taken an important step in recontextualizing this important *oeuvre*; it's time that the rest of the art world caught up.

Amy Sherlock

Above
Gillian Lowndes,
Tongue, 2008, latex,
sand, aluminium,
horse hair and metal,
42 × 6 × 5 cm

**Opposite page
Top left**
Dana Lok,
Conjurors I, 2016,
oil on canvas,
1.8 × 1.7 m

Bottom left
Dana Lok,
Tilted Bather, 2014,
oil on canvas,
1.8 × 2 m

Top right
Serban Savu,
Small Talk After Lunch,
2012, oil on canvas,
1 × 1.3 m