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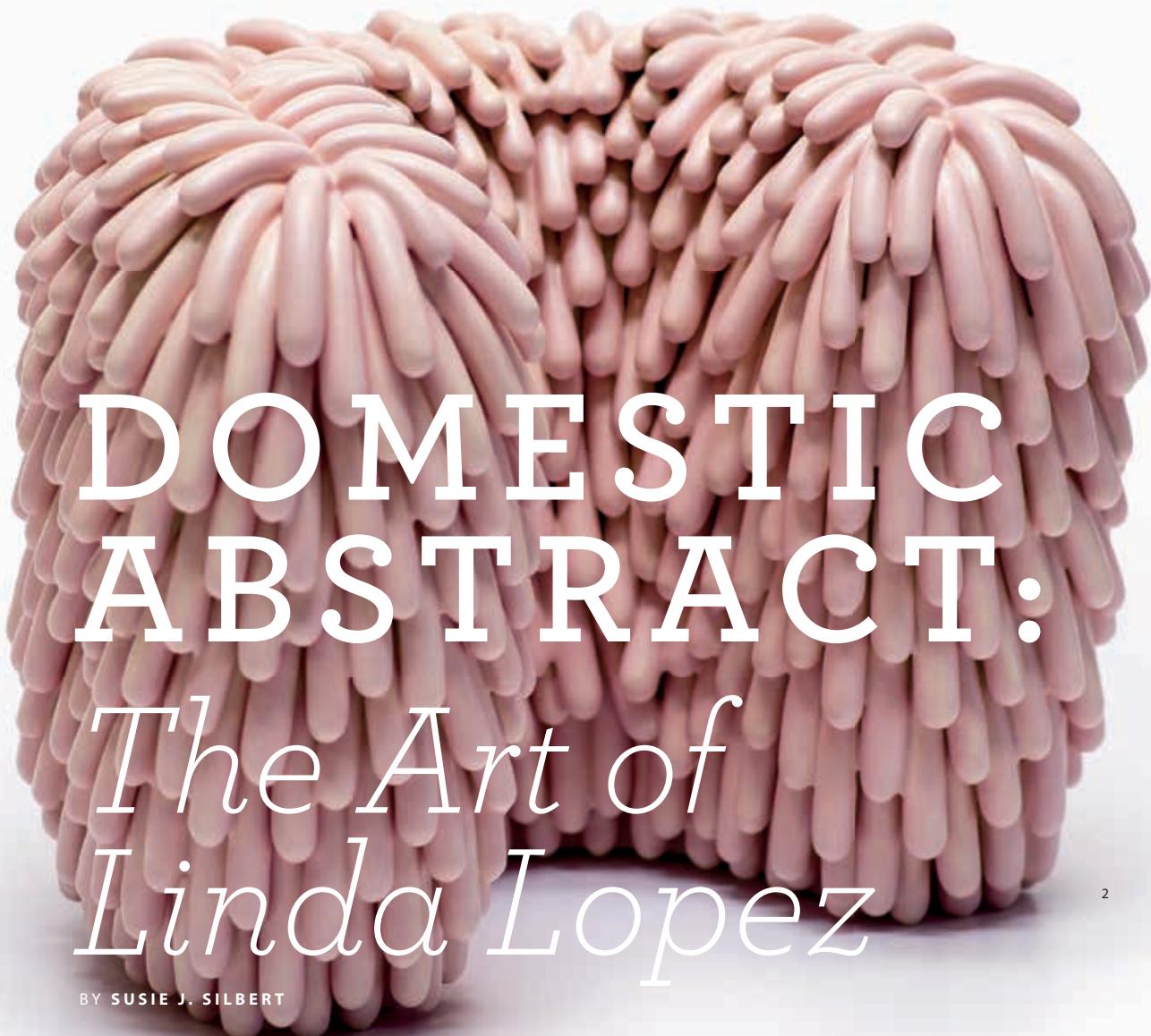
Also Showcasing  
Glass, Ceramics & Wood



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**1**  
*Untitled (Pineapple)*,  
ceramic, 14 x 7 x 7"

**2**  
*Untitled (Pink Horseshoe)*,  
ceramic, 7½ x 9½ x 8"



# DOMESTIC ABSTRACT: *The Art of Linda Lopez*

BY SUSIE J. SILBERT

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Unlike many others who pursue a life in the arts, Linda Lopez did not harbor any childhood dreams of becoming an artist. Instead, this central California native enjoyed the routines of life with her family: tending her father's goats, chickens and cows; assisting in the massive garden where the family grew much of their food; and helping her mother, who was a baker, make cakes. It was a chance suggestion by a guidance counselor that led to her into art.

"I didn't know what to major in," says Lopez, "and when I told him I had enjoyed an art appreciation class, he said you should just take art, and when you get to the college, you can change your major."

But when she arrived at school and realized how challenging her art classes were compared to her other courses, she decided not to switch. As Lopez recounts, "At one point I was like, 'Wow this is what it takes to be an art major? I don't think I can do this!' It was really challenging, not just conceptually, but technically...Because of that challenge, I decided to stick with it."

The most difficult course for Lopez that semester was ceramics. With her characteristic perseverance, she did not shy away from the subject, instead leaning into it, signing up for another class and then another, eventually declaring a ceramics major. Today, her vibrant combinations

of exquisitely sculpted ceramic objects and delicate drawings mask the tenacity that propelled her to this point. And yet, in their impeccable attention to detail, brilliant coloration and attention to the domestic, her pieces express the *joie de vivre* and stick-to-itiveness forged in her rural upbringing.

Lopez works in a variety of formats, from one-off objects to room-size installations, but a typical arrangement includes a grouping of ceramic pieces presented within a blonde wood shelf or slatted stand. The shelves and stands serve as framing mechanisms for sculptural tableaus depicting quiet moments of everyday



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*Shelf with Eggs, Objects and Dust*, steel, latex gloves, paint, foam, plaster, epoxy resin, ink

domesticity. Her pieces take a cheery approach to the problems of maintaining a household—her typical subjects include the accumulation of papers and knickknacks into piles, and the pernicious problem of proliferating dust bunnies. Her tone, however, is not one of chastisement; rather, her work is suffused with the self-satisfied feeling of drinking coffee on the couch on a weekend morning, lazily reading the paper, aware of, but not fixated on, the chores that are not being done.

Three main types of objects serve as characters in these homey mini-dramas. Gridded boxes represent the skeletons of objects: storage crates and hanging file folders, two-by-fours and baskets. Formed of activated, modulating clay coils evince the artist's hand and invest the pieces with a folksy, dreamlike quality. Joining these are hairy, mop-like constructions, plump and approachable in fondant-like hues of matte orange, pink and bright yellow. Inspired by the thick fingers of chenille dusters, these sheepdog-looking pieces allude both to dust that accumulates around the house as well as to objects—often objects of art—that themselves can become the targets of dust collection. Lopez calls the third category of objects “plants.”



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*Some Things Need Nothing*, ceramic, wood, ink and watercolor on paper

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*Objects Made To Be Rejected (detail)*, ceramic and wood, 66 x 62 x 18"



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Cacophonous confections of linear loops that sprout almost virally from solid bases, one can sense the energy of vegetal growth in their forms. Occasionally, she glazes them in metallic bronze to allude to an even more abstract subject, namely the way that sunlight streaming in through the windows can distort the contours of even the most familiar objects.

The artist arranges these staples into evocative compositions, as appealing in their narrative as they are in their form and coloration. For instance, *And to Think it All Started with That*, which counterpoises a chartreuse mop with a mushrooming linear form poised to overtake it, is about the vexatious way that piles form in the home. Like iron shavings to a magnet, all it takes is one thing out of place for the clutter to accumulate. In this case, the dreadlock-ed mop, friendly in a dopey sort of way, stands idly by. It is an impotent sentinel powerless

against the encroaching detritus, unaware of its role as a catalyst of disorder.

Despite the obvious planning and care in their construction, there is an element of capriciousness in Lopez's works. The addition of items is as diverse as ceramic chains hung on nails, clay rocks pinning down papers, and drawings of gently erupting lava, potted house plants, or piles of repeating ovoid forms, investing her pieces with a restrained freneticism that is the spark of a work in progress. The jaunty phrasing of her titles, things like *A Moment Is Forgetfulness* and *Some Things Need Nothing*, add to the sense that these are notes, jotted down quickly, reminders of thoughts Lopez would like to return to in the future.

In truth, much of her subject matter is formed through chance encounters with objects in her day-to-day life. Her sympathy for a mop bucket she found tossed in a

dumpster while in school and a wall of old chains left by the previous owner of her new house have both served as inspirations for her work. "It's because I kind of want other people to have that moment [of empathy] with these objects," she explains, "but they don't, because [in my pieces], it's not those objects anymore. It is a replica. But I guess for me, I'm creating a vision of this world that I live in. It's almost like 'Linda goggles.'"

With their soft colors and domestic themes, it could be easy to dismiss Lopez's work as mere frivolity. Not so, says Anna Walker, Windgate Foundation Curatorial Fellow for Contemporary Craft at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. "The linear qualities in Lopez's ceramic pieces juxtaposed with drawings that evoke architectural renderings create a nice dialogue between two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms. And there's something about her textures that are very current," comments Walker. "It's playful work, but it doesn't come off as sentimental or disingenuous. Instead, it's calculated, directed and lush."

Lopez has commented that her pieces take on the characteristics of whatever environment she happens to be working in at the time. While in graduate school in Colorado, her work was intensely domestic. Later, during a residency at The Clay Studio in Philadelphia, it was gritty and urban. Today, Lopez has returned to a rural lifestyle, albeit one far from the breadbasket of central California. She and her husband, the ceramic sculptor Mathew McConnell, moved to Fayetteville, Arkansas, a few years ago to teach at the university there. They recently bought a house in the country, where Lopez looks forward to raising chickens and goats. How this new physical and domestic terrain will present itself remains unknown, but you can be sure whatever twists and turns Lopez's sculptures take next, her work will be just as humorous, joyful and well-conceived as ever. ●

Susie J. Silbert is a curator and writer with a background in craft and design. Based in Brooklyn, New York, she has worked on projects in Houston and North Carolina, and is a lecturer at the Rhode Island School of Design. She lectures and writes frequently on the history of craft.

