

# Ceramics That Kill, Quilts That Admonish: Linda Lighton and Jessica Wohl

---

 [informalityblog.com/ceramics-that-kill-quilts-that-admonish-linda-lighton-and-jessica-wohl](http://informalityblog.com/ceramics-that-kill-quilts-that-admonish-linda-lighton-and-jessica-wohl)

July 27, 2018

One of the many takeaways from Linda Lighton's work is mankind's pursuit of ownership and power through the guise of glossy weaponry. Lighton's sculptural ceramics of lipsticks, oil rigs, guns and bullets place us under the spell of these sensuous objects of intimidation, showing how we long to handle and possess them, gently stroking their gleaming surfaces like purring cats on our laps.

Paired in the same space are Jessica Wohl's quilts portraying declarative statements concerning culture, politics and values. Supported by floral patterning and other, sharper markings, her quilts are meant for viewers to confront "systematic forms of racism and classism that divide communities." They provide a balance to Lighton's work as softer and gentler objects, but are no less sharp and direct for being embedded in objects of warmth and comfort.



We Shouldn't Have To Live This Way  
Image by Abdi Farah

I do not necessarily agree these two artists ought to have been shown together. In separate exhibitions their firepower would stand as singular, strongly conditioned statements. In this room with both bodies of work, their individual commentary does not require the support and balance of one another. Each artists' work stands tall on its own.

Lighton's work makes no qualms about a world that has long been informed by a toxic masculinity. Lighton moves past technique to enact a conversation and not just expose the material. She shows us the shameless pursuit of immediate material gratification achieved at any cost and by any means necessary. In a vein similar to artist and activist Nancy Spero, Lighton's objects are, to reference Spero, an "unapologetic statement against the pervasive abuse of power."



I don't want a bullet to kiss your heart  
Image by E.G. Schempf

Let's not be surprised by how readily Lighton has moved these fear-based, power hungry objects into something that borders on erotica (For context, consider two of her works on display, *The Modern City State* or *I don't want a bullet to kiss your heart*). These phallic symbols of control are bordering on sexy, and that can be a difficult thing to deny.

Is that gun going to shoot? Will that oil well create a gusher? Can this lipstick deliver you to ecstasy? Our greatest fears lie in anticipation and that's part of their seduction. Some of us are turned on by the danger; it is why some are so eager to go to battle or shoot a gun? Every action takes us one step closer to forcing people out of our way and it never eases our fear of anticipation. This is where I think Lighton's work is strongest; using these manipulative delivery systems to place the audience in a much more assertive role. We are dismayed that something presented as incredibly delicate, like ceramics, can represent these masculine objects that bring so much destruction. And because Lighton has worked these objects gently, but firmly, we are compelled to treat them with care. They also represent a part of ourselves that fears to admit our arousal towards them. It is at this point our inclination to smash them like the patriarchy they support rises to the top.

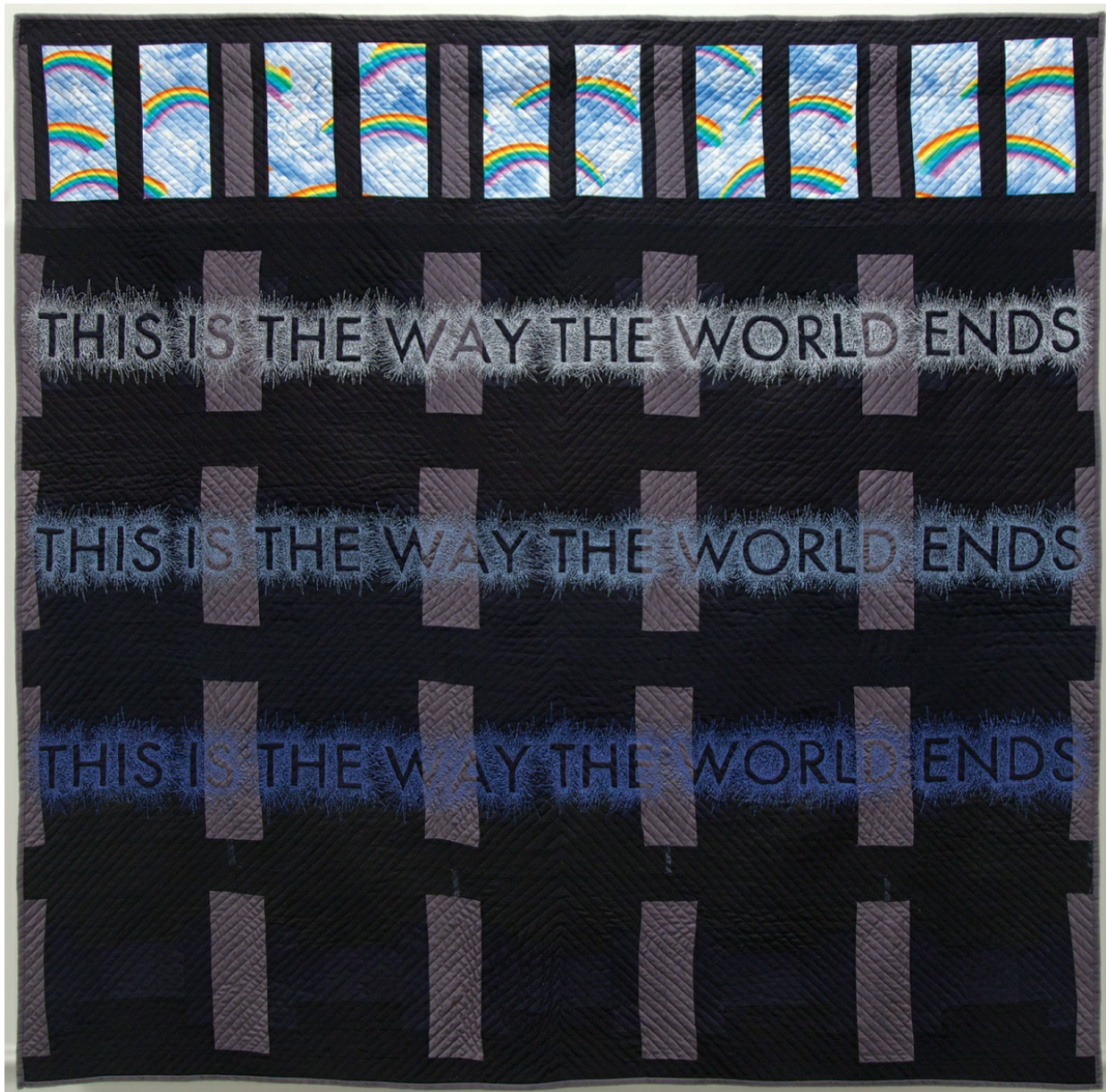
Turning away from suggestive ideas, this work also directs us towards more difficult truths. As the greenhouse effect comes to pass, Lighton's oil towers are solemn monuments to our imminent demise. History will look back at this era of abundance and question why we ignored our obligation to future generations. Right now, it can sometimes appear science and common sense are being relegated to the loony bin of fractured thinking while the world population grows, depleting natural resources. We defend it with guns, wrapping ourselves in the comfort of cold steel and firepower. Beauty is used as both a weapon of intimidation similar to a gun, which places the user of the lipsticks in a role that can be seen as either diminished for relying upon mating alone or usurping the rules of attraction to coerce and intimidate. Seen as talismans or souvenirs, however you perceive Lighton's work depends on whether you view these worldly circumstances as occupation or oppression.



Fear isn't a byproduct of hyperbole, it's an acknowledgement that deep in the cold pit of reality called *truth*, we are completely aware there is nothing that will fully protect us. Although Wohl's quilts are objects meant to do exactly that, their historical construction infers a firmly focused,

localized conversation, drawn closer by her finely tuned attention to craftsmanship.

The statements stitched onto these quilts derive from throwaway materials and other hand-me-downs that mean something more direct for her as she presents a powerful retort about community issues, including, racism, redlining and gerrymandering. These soft and loving items that hold young children and are cherished as heirlooms dedicates itself to taking an object almost sacrosanct, challenging her viewers out of any complacency.



Are We Becoming Hollow Men?  
Image by Abdi Farah

Wohl's stitching sometimes convey a more Modernist approach of crisscrosses and solid lines to indicate barricades and impediments. Specifically, *Are We Becoming Hollow Men* and *Good Luck*, hews too closely to gestures and patterns seen in some work by painter Kerry James Marshall, almost to the point of distraction.

Regardless of the history of quilting and ceramics as craft, both women have weaponized their deliveries, creating lasting impact. Putting them together in the same room, however, dilutes this strength. An ongoing, solo series of artists like Lighton and Wohl, would be unrelenting and incredibly stimulating.

However, we are not the less for seeing them together. These two women are saying the universe is not indifferent. Both are luring us into a false security where Wohl's quilts offer little warmth and Lighton's ceramics dispense no pity.



Thoughts and Prayers (celadon)  
Image by E.G. Schempf

*Thoughts and Prayers* May 11 through July 2018 at Weinberger's Fine Art Drawing Room in  
Kansas City's Crossroads Arts District