



LINDA SORMIN

JANE HARTSOOK GALLERY

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16 JONES STREET NEW YORK NY

# LINDA SORMIN



*Howling Room*, gl Holtegaard, Denmark, 2011 Photo: Anders Sune Berg

## MY VOICE CHANGES WHEN I SPEAK YOUR LANGUAGE

### Slow Burn

- Glenn Adamson

The Greenwich House Pottery has been in continuous operation for more than a century, and it has even deeper roots, having emerged from the Settlement House movement of the late 19th century. Working hand in hand with Arts and Craft reformers, Settlement leaders sought to create a support network and safe harbor for immigrants and other poverty-stricken urban residents. Often, they used craft as an economic underpinning for their efforts.

At first, encountering Linda Sormin's work in such a hallowed space comes as a shock. Yes, she works in clay – but not in a way that Greenwich's founder Mary Simkhovitch would have recognized. Sormin practices the art of the slow burn – both literally, in that each of her objects may be fired as many as seven or eight times to achieve various texture and color effects, and also figuratively, in that her sprawling installations communicate a carefully controlled fury. It is a vivid visual chamber music, in which not a single note of pragmatism, didacticism or functionalism can be heard.

Yet in a sense, Sormin's work is perfectly at home at Greenwich House Pottery, which has a long history of upending its own trajectory. In the 1960s Jane Hartsook – after whom the gallery here is named – forged an unlikely collaboration with the bad boy of ceramics, Peter Voukos, who came to demonstrate at Greenwich and created a sensation. Over the years other experimentalists also taught at the pottery, like the cerebral Tony Hepburn and the under-appreciated collagiste Margaret Israel, in whose constructions 'the hungry eye seizes whatever it adores' (in the words of New York Times critic Hilton Kramer).

It's in this lineage that Sormin's project can be seen to stand. She has described the pleasure of reconnecting with the "old school details like volume, gesture and containment" in preparing the exhibition, values that are inculcated in any beginning pottery student. At the same time, she has brought her established vocabulary of contrasts: raw clay, pinched in place, playing off refined fired forms; wild child accretions "skewered" (as she puts it) by lengths of rigid black pipe. The visitor is encouraged to wander through this ceramic wonderland as if through an ancient forest. Sormin has gone back to basics for this show, at the same time pushing herself forward. It's a dynamic in which Hartsook, and many others who have spent time here at Greenwich over the years, would have felt right at home.