



Love as body horror ... Lindsey Mendick, *Our Disastrous Couples Therapy 2*. Photograph: Ollie Harrop/courtesy the artist/Carl Freedman Gallery

Art

[Review](#)

‘So full-frontal, you feel like a voyeur for looking’: Lindsey Mendick: *Where You End and I Begin* review

Carl Freedman Gallery, Margate

With snogging snails, conjoined lovers and her own pug Telly as Jesus, the ceramicist sculpts a mangled mythology of her own relationships

Eddy Frankel

If you're worried that romance may be dead, just one look at Lindsey Mendick's **new exhibition** will reassure you that it's very much alive. It's just a bit damaged and mangled. Well, mangled is an understatement. The English ceramicist paints a

portrait of romantic love that's mutated and twisted, gory and gross. This is love as body horror, romance as drug, co-dependency as living nightmare.

The whole show is inspired by her love for her partner, the artist Guy Oliver, and her little black pug, Telly. Grainy, gritty Polaroids in the opening room find Lindsey and Guy embracing and canoodling, arms wrapped around each other, toes in one another's mouths, naked bodies writhing together, tongues licking nipples, feet pressed against bare bollocks. It's an incredibly intimate insight into their relationship, so full-frontal that you feel like a voyeur for looking.

This love has a toxic edge: it's as damaging as it is nurturing, as painful as it is essential

And you've only just scratched the surface. Mendick depicts herself as the Virgin Mary on a vase, with Telly the pug as a surrogate baby Jesus. Guy's face screams out of another vase, horns poking out of his head like he has transformed into a fawn or satyr. It's all folkloric and religious, as if Mendick is writing the mythology of her own relationship.



Scratching the surface ... Where You End and I Begin. Photograph: Ollie Harrop/copyright the artist/courtesy of the artist and Carl Freedman Gallery, Margate

A table is laid out with ceramic sex toys that have taken on organic, uterine forms; Telly is encased in guts like a prenatal baby. There are toothbrushes with two handles, snails snogging. This is obviously about love and adoration, the anxieties of

parenting, the ups and downs of relationships – but it's deeply unsettling and uncomfortable, too.

The final space is filled with ceramics of Lindsey and Guy's faces knitted together, the duo sharing a rib cage, a womb with little feet kicking out of it, a heart with a hand wrapped around its valves, pumping the blood. The two lovers are so intertwined, they've become one vile mutant form, joined together for ever. The ceramics are white, displayed as if in a medical laboratory. Mendick is a modern Dr Moreau, fusing together a hybrid mutant creature made of pure love.



Emin meets Cronenberg ... Where You End and I Begin. Photograph: Ollie Harrop/copyright the artist/courtesy of the artist and Carl Freedman Gallery, Margate

Sounds nice, sure. But panels on the wall tell a different story. Across images of seahorses, slugs, wombs and the skeletons of conjoined twins, Mendick writes phrases: “I’m simultaneously sick of you and can’t live without you”; “I’m sure you’d be happier without me”; “Can you not see I’m drowning?” This love has a toxic edge. It’s as damaging as it is nurturing, as painful as it is essential. Not because their love is unique, but because Mendick has realised that’s just what love is. It’s two people getting so close that they need each other, and so close that they can destroy each other, too. The line between love and hate, toxic and healthy, is a pretty thin one.

The vases aren’t as impressive: their slightly crude aesthetics just don’t seem to sit right, but the rest of the show is great: ultra personal, super-exposed art, with a woozy, tense atmosphere. There’s more than a hint of Tracey Emin’s no-holds-barred emotional vulnerability (the two artists are friends and both live in Margate) but that’s no bad thing. Mendick has taken Emin’s overwrought blueprint and pushed it into the realms of Cronenbergian body horror and Prozac Nation millennial malaise.

This show is probably Mendick’s best work to date: a funny, anxious, paranoid, surreal and unashamedly personal look at the romances that define her life. What’s not to love?