

Watch out Grayson Perry! Here's a new X-rated artist to be thrilled by

Lindsey Mendick has arrived from nowhere like a truck crashing through your living room wall — not even Tracey Emin told us so much about her turbulent love life



Lindsey Mendick in her studio GEMMA DAY

Waldemar Januszczak, Chief Art Critic

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Artists arrive on the scene in different ways. Some work diligently for decades and are finally noticed. Others scream, “Look at me!” in their student shows. But the ones who set the pulse speeding, the really precious ones, are the ones who turn up from nowhere like a truck crashing through your living room wall.

So it was with Lindsey Mendick. In 2022, having never heard of her before, I reviewed a survey called *Strange Clay: Ceramics in Contemporary Art* at the Hayward Gallery, and there she was, the in-house ceramicist at the Bates Motel, creating squalid domestic interiors with clay and tampering with the plumbing so the rats, the slugs, the cockroaches could crawl in. I even remember an octopus slithering out of the lavatory. This wasn’t what ceramics were put on earth to do. Who the hell was Lindsey Mendick?

Over the next couple of years, in show after show, in Scotland, in Norwich, she emerged more roundly. A noisy colour bomb with blue hair. She was from Margate, an uncouth working-class voice determined to crash the posh enclave of pottery and inject honesty and vulgarity into its storylines.

Of course, her path had been cleared by Grayson Perry. Of course, working in Margate, she was working in the shadow of Tracey Emin. In *Where You End and I Begin*, her hair-raising new collection at the Carl Freedman Gallery, those influences are foregrounded — until the Mendick Me Monster grabs the show and starts whacking it about. Not even Emin has told us as much as this about her turbulent love life.



Where You End and I Begin by Lindsey Mendick
COURTESY CARL FREEDMAN GALLERY/PHOTOGRAPHY: OLLIE HARROP

The opening sights are very Perry. A dozen vases arranged on plinths pull us into the psychodrama with snippets of image embedded in the glaze and slithery inventions for the handles. Some snakes. Some worms. Some chains.

The first vase shows Mendick dressed as the Holy Mary holding a dog, a cuddly pug, in the classic mother and child pose while the golden cherubs that surround her sing of love. One artwork down and already we have blasphemy, cosplay, interspecies attraction and the carefree corruption of mythology.

The image of the Holy Lindsey cradling her dog turns out to be as soppy as the show gets. From here on it's *Fifty Shades of Grey* laced ever more generously with Dostoevsky: sex, sex, sex; me, me, me; worry, worry, worry. At intervals we pause to admire the glistening of an exposed human organ, inevitably a heart, hacked out brusquely from a chest. If pottery exhibitions had cinema ratings, this one would get an X.



Baby Jesus

LINDSEY MENDICK; COURTESY CARL FREEDMAN GALLERY/OLLIE HARROP

While the pots point to Perry, the Polaroids on the first walls point to Emin. Unsettlingly intimate, they feature Mendick and her boyfriend making love while

the pug looks on. It's the kind of outrageously personal Polaroid fest Emin has pioneered, although in this instance the revealing snaps have been dipped in clay. Having paid tribute to her influences, Mendick spends the rest of the show leaving them behind and plunging us ever deeper into a ceramic netherworld of Sadean sex and furious relationship anxiety.

Initially, the middle room appears charming. The line of decorated plaques that encircle you have an instructional mood like the souvenir signs you can buy on the Margate seafront that say "Don't call it a dream, call it a plan" or "This is our happy place". But where those are fluffy, Mendick's are searing, rousing, bitingly honest.



Wacky Wednesday (Spicing Things Up)
LINDSEY MENDICK; COURTESY CARL FREEDMAN GALLERY/OLLIE HARROP

“The beast in you hates the bitch in me,” spits one. “It was like f***ing a Soprano,” screams another. She’s sharing the intimate secrets of her relationship with a guy called Guy, cast here as boyfriend and torturer, lover and hater, destroyer and saviour. All I know about Guy is what I can see and read on this sweaty journey, but one quality I know him to possess is fortitude. Mendick, in her own art, in her own words, is definitely a handful.

By now it’s clear that for all its gore and angst this is a show about love: the Lindsey and Guy story with every window thrown open. Against its will, the formerly sophisticated medium of ceramics has been pushed into the bedroom and handcuffed to honesty. A potter with intense identity issues is spilling every bean she owns.



Our Disastrous Couples Therapy
LINDSEY MENDICK; COURTESY CARL FREEDMAN GALLERY/OLLIE HARROP

The final room is the show's masterpiece. Until now the work has been knick-knack-sized: gaudy and petite. Suddenly the artistic vision enlarges and bleaches. Stretched out before us is a huge vitrine filled with snowy-white body parts arranged on thin metal poles. Angelic music accompanies the mood switch. But it cannot hide the Auschwitz vibe.

In the 18th century, Meissen employed gleaming white porcelain to look classy. In Margate in the 21st century, Mendick uses it to heighten the moments. Bride of Chucky got here before us and the body parts she left behind — the mouths, the hands, the fingers, the breasts — seem to be attacking each other and telling an unfolding story of love and squalor.

Is that strangling or is it sex? Is he biting her or eating her? Lindsey and Guy are re-enacting their tempestuous relationship in stop-start animation done with clay. The resulting love drama pulls you in and demands attention. I circled and recircled the action like a dog on a leash.

While you're in Margate, find time to visit Emin's art school, where the latest intake of students is having its graduation show. The nine survivors are all painters. All make strong debuts. My favourites were Iyunola Sanyaolu and Esme Keenleyside. Remember the names.

Sanyaolu's paintings have surfaces as rich, glistening and tasty as Italian gelati. Her images, quiet scenes of domesticity, try to push through, but only just make it. So the art hovers alluringly on the edge of abstraction.

Keenleyside has a thing about teddy bears. They haunt most of her pictures. But it's never the cuddly teddy of little girls' dreams. Instead, we get a complex, thoughtful, philosophical presence: the Plato teddy.

Lindsey Mendick: Where You End and I Begin is at the Carl Freedman Gallery, Margate, to Aug 30; ***Tears 2026*** is at TKE Studios, Margate, to Aug 31