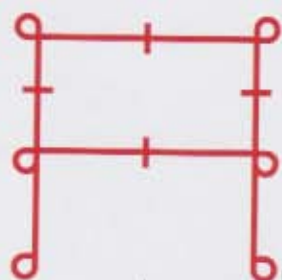




C'est bon! French artist Laurence Jenkell creates giant candies that look sweet enough to eat, but their witty simplicity belies the complexity of her craft.

Photography by REBECCA MARSHALL



At first glance you might be forgiven for thinking that Laurence Jenkell is the Willy Wonka of the art world. Her obsession with candy is not unlike that of the famous Roald Dahl character. But instead of golden chocolate bars and everlasting gobstoppers, Jenkell creates giant wrapped candy pieces, decorated in bright and bold colours. So realistic are the wrappings that they make children's eyes pop everywhere they appear in exhibitions around the world. Sadly these sweets are not for eating, but Jenkell does hope they send a positive and happy message to the global community, as Leyla Aliyeva discovered when they met at Jenkell's studio near Cannes to discuss her current show of 'flag candies' in Baku.



Laurence Jenkell at her studio near Cannes (top left), and her work on display at Baku's Heydar Aliyev Centre this spring.

Candy®

GIRL





LEYLA ALIYEVA. You have an exhibition in Baku (until 31 October) of giant sweets in flag wrappers. Could you tell me why you are inspired by candy and how you make the pieces?

LAURENCE JENKELL. Candy brings back memories from my childhood; I think it does for a lot of people. When I was little my parents would not let me have candy, so I think there's some deep-seated frustration there. In a way, these giant candies are my revenge!

I didn't go to art school, but about 22 years ago I went to some evening classes to learn how to draw, how to use acrylic and oil and all kinds of materials. I would paint nudes or still-lives but that was not what I was ultimately interested in. I knew I needed to make something with materials. I decided to try and create art with the candy I kept in my house for my young



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children (who are now nearly 18 and 20). I'd experiment by putting them in the oven and then put the melted pieces on canvas with epoxy resin, covering them with transparent boxes. I realized that Plexiglas, when heated, would melt, and I fought with the material for some time before eventually being able to work it into a twisted candy-wrapper shape. I became very familiar with the material and realized I could do many things with it. The next step was finding a bigger oven.

LA. How do you make the wrappers look so lifelike?

LJ. I use canvas covered in resin. Galleries were not too sure of them at first. I had to fight, but now my pieces are really well received all round the world. I've made them in bronze, aluminium, marble, and all sorts of colours.

LA. Do you eat candy now?

LJ. I do, and I love it, but not as much as I love making it art.

LA. I gave it up four years ago. I loved it, though, particularly chocolate.

LJ. Exactly, everyone has a personal relationship with candy. Flags have a similar way of connecting people. I love travelling – visiting new countries, getting to know new cultures. The bright colours of flags and their simple designs make perfect candy wrappers, so my enlarged flag candies are a kind of homage to all people everywhere. There is no political statement – just something human and positive.

LA. How many countries have you been to?

LJ. I've done round-the-world trips two or three times, but when you travel for business you don't see much. My husband always says, "We will go back", so hopefully we will.

LA. Was your trip to Baku in spring your first visit?

LJ. It was my second. I love it there. I particularly enjoy the Old Town. And the city's modern buildings are just amazing, especially Zaha Hadid's Heydar Aliyev Centre. There is a lot of emotion in it.



LA. You also create robots in your work.

LJ. Again, this is something that stems from my childhood. I found images of robots in a book in my grandfather's attic. He told me, "One day these robots will exist". I thought he was crazy, but he was right. I found them fascinating. My work in creating them began with what I call 'built art' – based on buildings. I'm very inspired by architecture and the fantastic buildings I've seen in cities like Shanghai and Dubai. I make these 'built art' pieces, add two arms and it becomes a robot. I've even made a candy robot!

LA. I think what is very important about artworks is when the artist puts their soul into a piece. If you do it from your heart it will always work.

LJ. I agree – that's true for everything; if you do it with love and passion, you will produce something wonderful.

LA. Which artists inspire you?

LJ. Picasso was just amazing, as well as Frida Kahlo, Louise



Bourgeois, Nicki de Saint Phalle and Camille Claudel, who worked with Rodin. I really admire women artists, for the difficulties they have faced.

LA. Do you think they still face difficulties today?

LJ. Yes. We still have to struggle and fight, but we love it and we make it work.

LA. Your work suggests you're a bright and happy person. Is that the case?

LJ. Yes, I'm always very positive. It's good that you can feel it in my artwork. Whenever I draw I have so many thoughts and emotions in my head. I wake up in the night and feel compelled to draw. I also find it hard to relax. I always need to be thinking, drawing...

LA. So what's next?

LJ. Abu Dhabi, then Bratislava, then Monaco, then Paris. My DNA sculptures are important works for me - DNA is life itself. The robots I make more for fun, and the buildings because I love architecture. But the candies will be a part of my repertoire forever. ■



Laurence Jenkell in her studio; with Leyla Aliyeva and her candy and robot pieces. In spring her flag candies went on display in Baku at the Heydar Aliyev Centre.