

Interview Judith Stone

1. Your artworks receive different ideas of inspiration. What are your main sources of inspiration?

The stimuli for my work were initially quite varied, but have nevertheless remained constant over the years. Of significance is the fact that I grew up in the New York City metropolitan area, a well known center for the visual arts. During trips to Manhattan, both with my mother, an accomplished artist herself, and alone as a young woman, I was repeatedly most moved by Auguste Rodin's imposing, semi-abstract sculpture of the French novelist Honore Balzac, in the Museum of Modern Art's sculpture garden, and by Louise Nevelson's fully abstract, pervasively black installation, which at one point dominated the entire second floor of the Whitney Museum. My intense reaction to the powerful presence of these singular creations was eventually reinforced by exposure to massive geologic formations during a six-year stay in the American West, specifically Boulder, Colorado. I must add that contributing as well to an accelerating desire to become a studio artist was a visit to Kenilworth Castle, in central England, in my mid-twenties. As was the case for both the Rodin and Nevelson sculptures, and the other-worldly geologic formations in Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah, at Kenilworth I found the jagged, indestructible stone walls of the castle, roofless as it was, mesmerizing. Clearly then, I was, and continue to be, drawn to the visually provocative, often unsettling, rather than the calm and soothing.

The impact of this decades-long series of experiences is evident in the nature of my own studio work, multi-layered and visually assertive as it is. Two-dimensional rather than three and wall hung, the central motif in the majority of pieces is powerful construction machinery, always rendered in graphite. Important to note, while the machinery itself is fabricated in metal, its design and operation most commonly emerge from its engineers' in-depth study of human anatomy. Indeed, the organic quality of the equipment, now crucial to the building of architectural structures, has intensified my focus on this central motif in my work for nearly thirty years.

A second, more recent stimulus is that of ropes, whose flexibility and pragmatic value in so many areas of human activity first impressed me during a stay at a wildlife research station in Northern Arizona. I should emphasize that, at the station itself and throughout the vast Arizona flatlands, horses tethered to posts or guided around corrals by lengths of rope, far outnumbered cars and trucks. As for the ropes themselves, their malleability and capacity for lifting and lowering, securing and releasing all manner of materials continues to be essential throughout world culture, the current dependence of computer technology notwithstanding. So, absorbed as I've been for decades by construction machinery, I have shifted from time to time to the alternative motif of ropes, also rendered in graphite, in developing images where the primary *flexible* motif serves as the antithesis not only of the power, but the rigidity of heavy, often intimidating machinery. The result is an expansion in the range of my imagery, visually and in content. One might say, then, that the machinery and the ropes function as complementary constants in a body of work characterized by a wide range of variables..

2. Your artworks are technically complex, could you explain us how you create them? Or how does the artwork is developed from the idea to its final realization?

The development of a new piece in my studio inevitably begins with the graphite rendering of one of the motifs discussed above. The drawing process itself serves two purposes. on the one hand, it allows for a quiet, contemplative frame of mind; on the other, it generates possibilities regarding future moves in the processing of each piece. As I draw, I leaf mentally through past experiences, many recorded by the photographs of my travels that stud my studio walls, visualizing a wealth of options for a completed piece. Indeed, crucial to the evolution of my pieces *is* the pervasive use of photographs, always my own, rather than sketches of concrete phenomena. Moreover, for many years, I resisted the temptation to inject the photos themselves into work that, early in my career, relied exclusively on meticulous graphite drawing for effect. Eventually, however, in the mid-1990's, I realized that that the greater number of photos I'd shot during my travels didn't lend themselves to graphite drawing, and that the integration of the photos themselves in work that was, in fact, becoming "mixed media" might produce more intriguing images to the viewer.

Also, placed on a network of shelves in my studio, is debris collected at abandoned construction sites. These found objects, both regular and irregular in form and enameled in black or saturated red, ironically project aesthetic elegance *via* the simple application of hardware store paint. So, In the end, the integration of enameled construction site debris in a growing oeuvre of mixed media pieces results in images that integrate three levels of reality: renderings of content depicted in photographs; the photographs themselves; and actual objects, throwaways in the minds of construction workers, but evocative for this artist.

A final element in pieces completed in the past 25 years is the strategic deployment of tinted, transparent Plexiglas, in pane or box form, the Plexiglas partially masks the photographs, in their entirety or in shards, so as to distinguish the photos from the rendered motifs, enameled debris, and in some pieces, monochrome panels of color. In fact, for this lifelong lover of film, there is a clear analogy between the altered coloration of the photos, as perceived through the tinted, transparent Plexiglas, and flashbacks in time achieved by traditional film directors.

The relation of parts to whole in my work does differ significantly from piece to piece, the greater number created in pairs. While graphite rendering even now, in some pieces, dominates the image, as in "Wide Load I & II", it can also be counterbalanced by the equally potent presence of photographic imagery, as in "Return I & II". Although the interrelatedness of parts to whole may change from one piece to another, the decision as to the relationship's link to the original motive for each image is arrived at slowly and methodically, and remains firm throughout the development process.

3. You have traveled a lot, what do you think about the concept of internationality in the artistic field, dealt with the exhibition?

Clearly, extensive world travel has had a marked impact on my work. I have, in fact, traveled and lived, studied and taught, created and exhibited studio work not only in the United States, but in Western Europe, the British Isles, Japan, and Israel. The purposes for the travel have been multiple; family vacations, my husband's and my own job requirements, and significantly, longstanding, insatiable curiosity about areas of the world I've discovered through academic coursework, film, and voracious reading. The discoveries I've made in my journeys have been revelatory. For example, I wouldn't have known of the massive influence Western culture has long had on Japan if I hadn't spent so much time exploring Tokyo. The Caucasian appearance of mannequins in Tokyo's department store windows is a case in point. As for elsewhere in Japan, the sloped walls of Kyoto's landmark, Nijo castle or the horrifying residue of the allied bombing of Nagasaki would have been no more than book knowledge if I hadn't encountered both during a year spent teaching for Temple University in Tokyo. For that matter, I wouldn't have been aware of the significant impact the imperial Roman presence had on Israeli architectural history if I hadn't come in contact with the pillars of the roman *Cardo*, or marketplace, in Jerusalem's walled Old City. And in my own country, the United States, the extent and majesty of the mountains, canyons, and gorges pervasive in the American West would not have informed much of my imagery if I hadn't spent six years studying, teaching, and eventually, and developing early studio work in Boulder, Colorado.

Undoubtedly, decades of world travel do, to some degree, account for the unusual eclecticism in my *oeuvre*. However, for this artist, the resultant experiences certainly did and still do provide creative stimulation a less adventurous lifestyle would, lack. Here I must note as well that the presence in my work of the central, rendered motifs of elements of construction machinery or lengths of rope do, in a sense, link and stabilize a wide range of studio pieces that indicate the scope of my personal experiences throughout the world.

More transoceanic hugs,

Judith