

Sculptural Pursuit

WINTER 2007

ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS

DAVID GREENWOOD
KENDALL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

LAS MADRES
Project

ABSTRACT STYLES
DOMINGO RAMOS
MARIANNE WEIL

Reuben Kadish
Past Revisited

Inspiration - Interviews - Artwork - Photography - Poetry

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Marianne Weil in her studio with her cast bronze sculptures. Photo credit: Trix Rosen

Marianne Weil

A Modern Legacy from Megalithic Cultures

by Marilyn Noble

Marianne Weil's life work revolves around the theme of legacy. Her abstract bronze sculptures carry forward the spirit of the ancient megalithic cultures of Europe, while the lost-wax process she uses to create them is a throwback to an earlier time. As a professor, she feels "teaching carries on a legacy and has a lasting influence on sculpture in the world." She teaches her students specialized skills along with knowledge of art history so they can appreciate the historical context of their processes while they pursue their own contemporary styles and statements.

The Work and the Process

In 1995, Weil began an informal study of the prehistoric megalithic cultures of Western Europe. She visited Brittany, the location of several extensive sites including the cairn of the *Ile de Gavrinis*. The intricately carved dolmen stones began to inspire her work, and in the intervening years, she has made periodic trips to other Neolithic sites such as New

PICT'S LIFE
10" x 7" x 3"



Photo credit for all cast bronze unique sculptures: Matt Flynn



Grange, Knowth, and Carrowmore in Ireland; and Skara Brae, the Ring of Bodgar, and the Standing Stones of Stenness in Scotland's Orkney Islands. This past summer, Weil spent several weeks at *Los Millares*, a Copper Age site on the coast of Andalusia.

"It's become my personal journey to focus on the Neolithic spiritual centers," says Weil. "One place builds on the next. They're in my pores. Unconsciously, the places filter out through the work." She takes wax, a camera, and watercolor and drawing supplies with her when she makes her pilgrimages. She spends time hiking, walking, and reflecting, and visits the tombs and temples in different lights at several times of day. From these excursions, her body of work has emerged.

On her recent trip to Spain, she carved wax reliefs, and after returning home, created a series of monotypes. "The prints give me a means for more spontaneous work. I can flex my ideas in a new material, and with the inclusion of color, it becomes fresh and spontaneous. There's an immediacy about it," she says. "There's a correlation between printmaking and wax – the layering and building

up that I do in wax, I also do in printmaking. It gives me a path to follow that's directly related to what I was looking at. Right now, I'm having a nice dialogue between the two. The warm colors in the prints speak to the patina palette."

To create her one-of-a-kind bronzes, Weil pours one-quarter-inch-thick wax sheets and then builds her hollow forms. She adds textural impressions to both the inside and outside of each piece. "I have to be careful about what the inside looks like, but that has given voice to my creativity," she says. "Working in wax alleviates the necessity for molds and pushes me to not make multiples. It keeps me moving."

Weil's subject matter and process complement each other. "My pieces have openings, gouges, incisions, and punctures inspired by the windows and walls of large megalithic temples," she explains. "The window openings and piercings show that the interior is connected to the exterior, and while it comes from the inspiration of the Neolithic sites, it's also the way I construct work. I like working directly in wax; I feel connected to the hollowness of it."



TARXIEN
32" x 10" x 9"
Front and Back

Once each piece has been cast, Weil does the chasing and patinas herself, experimenting with traditional simple acids to add warmth and color to the metal. Many of her pieces, such as *SHADOW OF GAVRINIS*, *TARXIEN*, and *QUOYNESS I* capture the mystery of the places that inspired them – the standing stones, the inscribed runes, and the tunnels and burial chambers of the passage tomb cemeteries and megalithic temples scattered throughout Europe. Her trip to *Los Millares* has nurtured and fueled a new series, which she anticipates having completed in December or January.

The Early Years

Weil laughingly says that her mother, a painter, placed a paintbrush in her hand instead of a rattle. Growing up in an artistic household, Weil carved her first sculpture, an eighteen-inch by six-inch piece of alabaster, in her bedroom in her mother's Manhattan apartment. "In my later teens, I seized on the right path and followed my dream," she says. "For that I feel very lucky."

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As an undergraduate at Goddard College in Vermont, Weil was fortunate to apprentice as part of her degree program with a group of Italian artisans carving marble monuments in Barre. They encouraged her to visit Carrara, but she went to Pietrasanta instead, and "it took my breath away," she says. She finished her undergraduate degree and then decided to postpone graduate school, returning to Italy to work and learn the foundry process and stone carving in Pietrasanta.

She found an old mill for her studio and home and spent her first two years learning classic Greco-Roman sculpture techniques.

Then, in 1976, she moved to the studio of Sem Ghelardini, who "had a dramatic effect on my work," she says. "Sem really embraced young people and he was very generous. He let me have scrap marble to carve, and I was able to learn techniques from the artisans and rub shoulders with the famous artists there." She continued to work at Studio Sem on and off for seventeen years. "I have a wonderful group of family and friends there. I earned their respect and affection by working long hours side by side with them. It was a spirited life." To this day, Weil carries forward the lessons she learned and shares them with her students. "My respect for the artisans has filtered into my own studio, as has the discipline, and I impart that to my students."



QUOYNESS I
8" x 4" x 5"



CORAL EYES
24" x 12" x 5"



TESORO
17" x 9" x 5"



PAPA WESTRAY
top view
7" x 6" x 7"

In 1984, Weil decided it was time to return to New York for graduate studies and chose the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan with its prestigious faculty, including Mary Miss, Michael Singer, and Tom Blackwell. She earned her MFA in 1986.

Weil says her time in Italy gave her the confidence to move forward with her artistic vision in graduate school, and after ten years in Italy, she felt like she had something to teach students.

On Teaching

"Teaching brings balance to my life," says Weil, a professor at State University of New York Stony Brook and a visiting professor at Haverford College in Pennsylvania. "I sometimes feel isolated in the studio, and bouncing ideas off of young people is valuable."

Weil believes that students in both the studio arts and the art history departments benefit by interdepartmental learning, so, in collaboration with her art historian colleagues, she developed hands-on programs that included the study of Greco-Roman history with bronze casting as well as stone carving with art history. The students were able to watch a bronze pour or carve their own stone pieces. "The hands-on element is crucial," she says. "By connecting the process to the art historical context, the students in both areas get a sense of the broader landscape."



TILLING THE WIND
38" x 13" x 8"

Marianne Weil offers keys to success:

1. Stay focused, disciplined, and patient.
2. Work breeds work, so keep at it every day.
3. Keep your needs simple and modest, so you can stay clear about your goals.
4. Find sources to enrich your soul.
5. Live inexpensively – financial security helps your creativity.

Weil is also passionate about artists being involved in community “to influence and engage young people in the creative process.” In 2005, she obtained a grant to work in the village of Greenport on Long Island with a group of twelve lower income high school students who normally wouldn’t have the chance to experience art as an extracurricular activity. Together, they created a wax relief, which was then cast at the Stony Brook foundry. The students watched the bronze pour and the patina process, and helped with the sanding and waxing of the piece, which was then installed into a sidewalk in the village. “The process built an awareness of what an artist does,” says Weil. “We got the families involved and introduced the students to Stony Brook. It was one example of community outreach. I think more artists need to be active in their communities.”

Weil says her biggest challenge is balancing teaching and her lifelong commitment to bringing sculpture to her students with “finding my core creativity in a noisy, crowded, busy world; finding stillness. Going to remote places gives me the opportunity to find that quiet.” She feels fortunate that she’s had teaching to support her in her own creative work, and she’s grateful that over the past ten years her professional reputation has grown with the help of her association with Kouros Gallery in Manhattan. “It’s a wonderful gallery with a focus on sculpture, only two blocks from the Whitney Museum.” She also attributes her success to patience, perseverance, and believing in herself and her work. “I’ve continued to work no matter what the hurdles,” she says. “I didn’t get caught in rejection and personalize it. In this process, you learn so much more about yourself. It’s not just about success, but about peeling off the layers too.” ✨



SOUL KEEPER
41" x 9" x 2"

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