

## Linda Stein

These heroic torsos respond to war and our contemporary culture's testosterone overload, by scrambling expectations of Power/Vulnerability, Masculinity/Femininity, Warrior/ Peacemaker Embedding images and words in my archetypal sculpture, I draw comparisons to the comics of Wonder Woman, the anime of Princess Mononoke and the Asian Goddess of Compassion, Kuan-yin/Kannon. These figures from popular culture and religion have a special meaning for me; as symbols of protection, they represent the major theme of my art since the 1980s.

Having been duped to be in the current *Borat* movie with my *Warrior Women* sculpture (under the guise of a documentary to help third-world women), I have been sought after as "the only person who stood up to Borat." Appearing internationally in TV programs such as *Nightline* and *Paula Zahn* and numerous radio and print media including *The London Times*, *The New York Post*, and *Rolling Stone*, I continue to be featured in the comedian's TV trailers as the one who stopped the cameras and threw him out of her studio. My art was affected by this experience, and the current Rutgers exhibit includes two seven-foot paper sculptures, which address and ponder questions of manhood/womanhood in relation to cultural symbols and current events.

The concept of protection has permeated my sculpture for three decades. My experience running from the falling world trade towers propelled my previous abstract work to take on the figurative form of an androgynous or female torso. I came to choose Wonder Woman, Princess Mononoke and Kannon as images that reflect my need for role models.

The events of 9/11 had a great impact on my art. I was with my staff in my Tribeca studio when the police came to evacuate us. We ran northward holding hands, looking behind as clouds of white dust enveloped everything. My dreams changed. I stopped doing sculpture for a year. When I went back to it, it seemed as if I were continuing from where I left off. But that wasn't so. Instead, my abstract work was gravitating more and more toward the figurative. I didn't see this at the time, but the materials I was now using had much more of a feel of an archaeological dig. I didn't notice the gradual formation of a torso, the expansion of hips, the introduction of breasts. It wasn't until 2004 that I connected my sculptural form to a female Knight, a Warrior Woman that defines anew the concept of strength and power.

When I was first creating these Knights, however, there was something that gave me pause. They looked to me as if they were warriors, but how could that be when I felt they were symbols of pacifism? Then, after years of making my Knights, Wonder Woman came into my mind. I was intrigued by how she helped the downtrodden and saved the weak, how she promoted Democracy and represented Justice. I immediately felt a connection with my Knights. Then, when seeing the full-length anime of Princess Mononoke, the young warrior impassioned to save the environment, I felt a similar connection to my sculpture. I loved the fearlessness, honesty and authenticity of Mononoke, and, of course, her vibrant strength and audacity. I saw how Mononoke became popular in America, with many people not even realizing it was a movie made in Japan. After making the connection to these two icons of popular culture, I felt a need to add a timeless symbol, a more archaic figure to connect to the theme of my sculpture. Soon I discovered Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy and compassion. Kannon, often portrayed as an androgynous or female savior, has transcended sex to become a powerful symbol of protection. These knights will soon have a public presence in Portland, Oregon, where three of them, seven feet high, will be the centerpiece of the *Walk of the Heroines* on the Portland State University campus.



*Vulnerability Power, 2007*  
wood, metal, stone, printing on vinyl



*Knight of Wishing*, 2006  
48 x 16 x 6 inches, wood, metal, stone,  
leather



*Knight of Uplifting Moment*, 2006  
74 x 27 x 13 inches, wood



*Heroes, 2007*  
78 x 40 x 10 inches, collage, archival inks/printing on vinyl



*Anti-hero/Hero, 2007*  
78 x 40 x 10 inches, collage, archival inks/printing on vinyl