

Linda Stein.(Q+A)(Interview)



Curve

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The sculptor Linda Stein may be best known as one of the "commoners" duped by Sacha Baron Cohen in his 2006 film *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*--and for writing and giving interviews about that experience--but she has the last laugh. Her female Knights (lindastein.com), three larger-than-life bronze sculptures, have been chosen as the central sculpture commission for the \$4 million Walk of the Heroines at Portland State University in Oregon. CURVE spoke with Stein at her studio in New York City's Tribeca neighborhood.

How has the Borat incident affected your life and art?

At the time the movie came out, the New York Post did a story on me and called me Borat's "big catch." Media coverage after that snowballed and I was interviewed by news outlets around the world. I was recently interviewed by the BBC, based on my exhibition at Rutgers [which featured three 7-foot bronze and paper knights paired with shadowy images of Borat, Wonder Woman and Marilyn Monroe, respectively]. A reporter from the BBC asked about my sculpture incorporating Borat's image. He said that he noticed I had given him a small phallus and didn't I think it was a low blow? I replied I was simply continuing the conversation Borat started about sexism, homophobia and racism, and that he could use a little exposure himself.

Why did you start making female knights and woman warriors? What is your theory about female heroism?

Post-9/11, the media, Bush and his administration were determined to bring back men--in a John Wayne-cowboy way--and make them heroes in every scenario, while rendering all women damsels in distress. Women such as the 9/11 widows were portrayed as weak and vulnerable--their husbands were the heroes, not them. If the widows were career women or did heroic things themselves, the media weren't interested. But if the women were housewives or otherwise nonthreatening, then the

media made a big showing of how America--and American women--needed men as heroes.

My work is a corrective to that notion. I have chosen to highlight females as heroes and have chosen as source material Wonder Woman, the anime of Princess Mononoke and the Asian goddess of compassion, Kuan-yin.

And then I wondered how I, as a pacifist, a jogger who steps around anthills, was creating these warriors. When I stumbled on Wonder Woman, whom I had loved as a kid, and also thought of knights in shining armor, they were always female. It's the female knight who is the real hero.

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