

Sculptor Recreates What Scares Her

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A machete blade as a sign of love, harmony and the finer impulses of life? Not your first assumption? Understandable. But it just means you haven't seen the sculptures of Linda Stein.

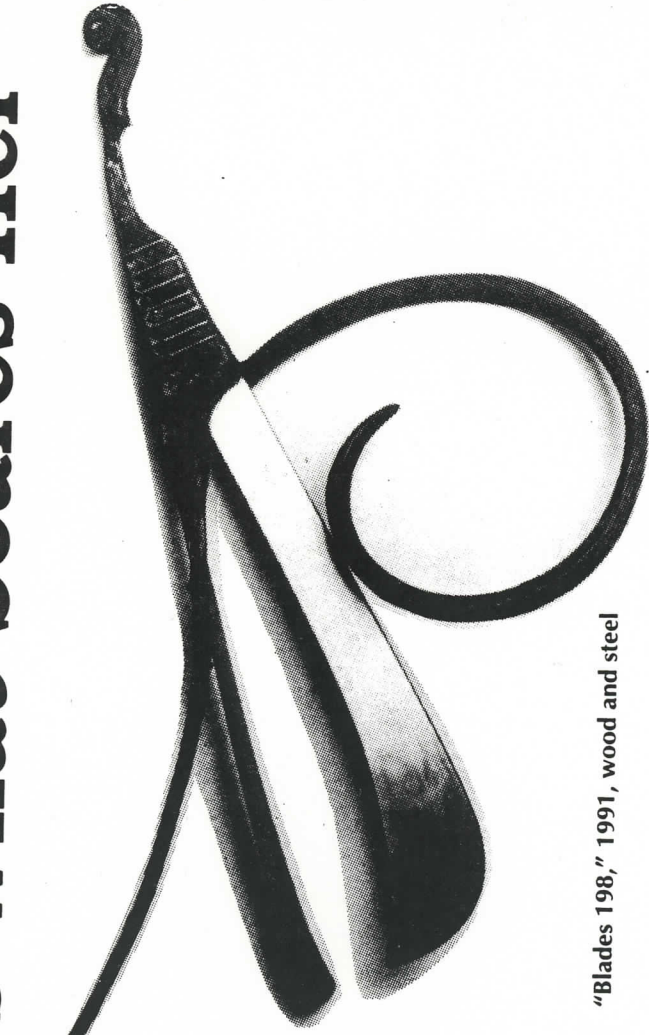
Stein organizes her sculptures around mean looking nine-inch machete blades from China. Using power tools to file the edge of the steel blade until it becomes dull she removes its handle, and fuses it with wood, rope, or parts of musical instruments to create a composition that balances softness and lyricism with the violence the blades evoke. The sculptures are suspended freely in the air, those attached to musical instruments make unusual sounds.

Kazimer Malevich, the Russian avant garde artist said (in 1920), "the artist creates

The elements dance with each other to a point of synergy. The blades are no longer scary—their frightening aura has been transformed so that their lethal power is left as a trace memory in the intellect. The visceral experience of them in this context is erotic, totemic and grounding.

When Stein's sculptures are displayed (she has had shows in New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, and Florida), she includes blank sheets with the heading "These baldes make me feel ..." for the viewers to complete. One viewer wrote, "They're like birds' beaks, curiously substantial and assertive, jutting off of the softer weightlessness of the wooden forms...They're aggressive, but don't unsettle me, because they anchor and stabilize also."

For one multi-media exhibit, at the Soho20 Gallery in New York, Stein produced a video on power versus vulnerability where dream sequences are intercut with



"Blades 198," 1991, wood and steel

"When I first saw the machete blades being sold in a street barrel, I thought, 'This is the saddest thing I could imagine. Girls shouldn't play with knives.'"

An equally powerful association with knives was a medical problem she had at the time. A uterine fibroid was growing inside her and five gynecologists insisted the only remedy for her discomfort was a hysterectomy. "I was determined not to have surgery," she explains. "The blades I worked with became a focal point as I attempted to arm myself against the doctors' instruments. I became obsessed with the internal violence I associated with uterine surgery. I did not want to let the doctors cut me. On the contrary, I needed to have the power of the blade within me, so I could heal myself. My fear extended itself to the street violence reported daily in our newspapers. I began to moderate panel discussions with psychologists, experts on

aggression, the Guardian Angels, and battered women authorities in an attempt to address the issue of reversing violence." Through all of this, Stein changed her diet and worked with some alternative modalities, ultimately healing her condition.

Stein's intention to "reverse" the destructive potential of the blade, to create a perception of it as an aesthetic object, gives rise to an even broader vision of breaking through stereotypes. She has founded BUGS (Breaking Up Gender Stereotypes) a curatorial project to organize exhibitions that help people examine and dissipate their rigid gender-based assumptions. The premier show featured the work of men quilters and women welders at the Triplex Gallery at the Borough of Manhattan College in Tribeca. ▲

Call (212) 226-4056 for information about viewing Stein's sculptures.

Dancing At The Revolution

a new sign; this sign is not a form for apprehending what has already been prepared, built, and brought into existence in the world—it is a sign of the new, of what is in the process of being built and appearing in nature through the artist." It is precisely this, the new, that comes into reality through Stein's work. The impression that her sculptures create is one of balance—of softness rooted in strength. The curves and the reflection of light on the blade provide counterpoints to the curve, lustre and shape of the wood. An evocative inlay is achieved in the way metals, stones, and bones are embedded in the wood. One piece combines dinosaur bones and teeth with prehistoric rock fragments on a copper engraving plate.

the sculptures. She recalls that as a child she had a recurring dream with a knife in it. "A knife was hurting me in some way. I'm sure the blade sculptures are related to that dream. I'm taking the fear I dreamed as a child and controlling it."

Stein started this work in 1989 following her series "Ceremonial Sceptres"—fantasy tools and ritual objects of an imaginary civilization. The more immediate stimulus was an invitation to submit something "outrageous" to an exhibition called "Bad Girls," curated by Corinne Robins as an activity of the 1990 Women's Caucus for Art National Conference at the Aljira Center for Contemporary Art in Newark. Stein recalls the moment when her vision began to percolate.