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“Warrior Women: The Yin and the Yang”

Sculptures and works on paper by Linda Stein

Paintings by Joan Barber

Flomenhaft Gallery

547 W. 27th Street, Suite 30

(212-268-4952; flomenhaftgallery.com)

Photo by Linda Stein

Linda Stein’s “Knight of Tomorrow 542,” fashioned from wood, metal and stone, on view now at Chelsea’s Flomenhaft Gallery.



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Linda Stein's defensive armor

By Ellison Walcott

In a world where many people feel the ever-looming threat of terrorism and violence, Linda Stein has created sculptures that symbolize strength, but also represent the ongoing feeling of vulnerability.

The Tribeca artist, who gained notoriety recently after her appearance in Sacha Baron Cohen's movie, "Borat," currently has an exhibition titled "Warrior Women" at the Flomenhaft Gallery in Chelsea, which runs through December 20. It features her latest series of sculptures, created after 9/11, although nearly three decades of work are represented in her studio. Armored and wood torsos fabricated from a montage of metal and other found objects hang on the white walls alongside deer horns fused with wood or leather and machete blades twisted and bent into musical notes.

Stein's inspiration for her art was born from several sources. "When I first became an artist, I thought it would allow me to do anything, and to have the power to create my own world. I could be in charge. The sky could be green if I wanted and the grass could be blue," said Stein last week, dressed in a black turtleneck, black jacket, blue jeans and New Balance sneakers.

At the center of her studio, chairs surround a large, square white table strewn with catalogs and postcards. Like the art on the walls, the chairs are a culmination of materials. She has added extra arms to one and a sidecar to another. In a third, the seat opens like a toy chest. Inside, Stein has created games that can be removed and



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played.

Over the decades, the paradigms for Stein's creations have become more complex. However, the theme of power and protection has been the red thread in her work. The armor and blades interplay strength and vulnerability in their compositions, as each piece of art is a balance of opposites.

“For the last 25 years, I've had a desire to create an archetypal form to metaphorically defend me against an aggressor. It goes back to dreams I had as a kid.” Stein pauses and turns to a page in the catalog from her current exhibition at Flomenhaft. In the catalog is an image of Janet Leigh from the 1960 version of “Psycho.”

“In one of the dreams I was running away from an intruder, perhaps, like a scene from ‘Psycho.’ I craved a figure of protection that would be impenetrable, powerful and aggressive and guide me against potential threats, and warn enemies to stand back, and not come too close.”

Protection is not the only function these sculptures play. The very nature of their shape and appearance allows them to assume a variety of roles. That's part of the beauty of Stein's art. Their visual language is universal, and thus, they have a host of cultural and historical interpretations.

In part, the diversity of materials — the bronze, metal, stone, copper wire, leather, ceramic, machete blades and wood placed like patchwork — allow for this multiplicity. Stein also maintains a connection to the organic, as each armored and wooden torso always follow a certain set of guidelines. Like a fashion designer, Stein has created a signature style.

“I follow certain rules all the time when creating the armor. One leg is longer than the other. One leg is always at an angle. The shape of the head is always the same.”



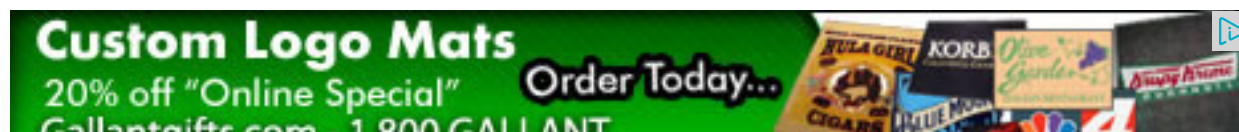
While all the work is strong in its execution and presentation, “The Blades Series” and “The Women Warrior Series” stand out. Perhaps it is the contradictions in their forms that create the aesthetic arrest.

Minimalistic in nature, the “Blades” series was created in the 90’s and consists of machete blades fused with wood. Stein dulled the blades and curved and corkscrewed these normally threatening objects into elegant figures. In her studio, they hang like artifacts from an archaeological dig, but when exhibited in a gallery, they float from an invisible thread, like a dancer hovering in midair.

Her female “Knights” series, on view at Flomenhaft, was a result of living and working in Tribeca during September 11, 2001. Because of their size, and weightiness, these larger-than-life armored torsos suggest someone of Wonder Woman’s or She-Ra’s stature. Encrusted with a range of metals including bronze, silver, calligraphic plates, and copper, as well as leather and wood, they are like relics from a long lost civilization that indicate strength and history. They seem to be either rising out of an excavation or being put to rest as a monument.

Discovery of materials and imagery is unending in these sculptures. And like many artists, Stein has learned over the decades to allow the art to give itself life. When creating, she is driven by an intuitive sensibility.

“More and more, I get the feeling as I work on my art, there really is an internal force directing me, sort of in an autonomic nervous system way. This force is leading me to go right or left and though I think I’m in the driver’s seat a lot of times, I realize I’m the chauffeur, and I’m just following orders.”



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