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FORM *Fitting*

Jane Rosen sees the shapes her sculptures will assume, even before she begins her chiseling, glass blowing, and drilling



Jane Rosen hears things few people do, even her fellow sculptors. "I have synesthesia—I can actually hear the forms my sculptures will take the moment I start on them," says Rosen from her Northern California studio, a place she claims is so remote that "it takes a twenty-minute drive just to get a quart of milk."

Amid that solitude, which she admits to finding both comforting and, at times, alienating, she hears the cries of birds of prey—owls, marsh hawks, eagles, ospreys, red-tail hawks, merlins, falcons—as well as foxes and other creatures. Sometimes, the birds actually fly into her home, but even if they don't establish that kind of contact with her, Rosen translates their presence into works made of stone or blown glass or marble, forms for which she is renowned.

"Those birds I see and hear are in my heart, and the moment I hear a hawk, especially a cooper's hawk, I can

see its form in the sensations I feel." Although she works with a small staff of young helpers, who are better able to hoist the heavy materials and plinths with which she works, perhaps her most intimate and inspiring companions are the birds. "If you watch the way a red-tail hawk poses, its presence is otherworldly. They have a silence about them and an intelligence that I have been unable to shake all these years. Every time I see one, it catches me. I am haunted by birds of prey."

Rosen began her early life as a sculptor in New York's SoHo, when the downtown neighborhood was the locus of the art world. At a time in the early 1970s when it was possible to rent a 6,500-square-foot loft on West Broadway for \$150 a month, Rosen found herself immersed in a fertile creative cauldron, with artist friends and teachers, who included Ross Bleckner, Chuck Close, Marilyn Karp,



Opening page: Sculptor Jane Rosen's stone *Sandman* is now in a private collection. Clockwise from opposite: Rosen also fashions the plinths on which her sculptures reside, notably for a show at New York's Sears-Peyton Gallery. She often makes prints, too, including *White Kite Hovering*. Her drawings and sketches stand alone or work as studies for sculpture.



Above: On one of the decks of her home and studio, Rosen (center, with her late dog, Rooky) goes "shopping" for the right stone. Her assistants include (from far left) Julius Beberman, Shannon Belardi, and Alex Rohrig. Below, left to right: Rosen admits to being able to stare for many hours at a time at works-in-progress. She hangs snapshots of objects on a wall as reminders of projects and as sources of inspiration.



Judy Pfaff, and other stars of the era, some of whom remain prolific.

Though encouraged to go West to study art, she chose instead to remain in New York, where she sculpted, drew, and also taught at the School of Visual Arts. "I was making art that was terrifically uncommercial," she says with a self-deprecating humor. "I managed to make things nobody could sell, and I did that for a long time. So, I had a teaching job, which I loved doing." Now, Rosen's sculptures, which are included in noted private and public collections worldwide, sell for sums that are decidedly commercial and could likely pay for a SoHo loft today.

It was in her thirties, during a six-week stint working in Portugal with grant money, when Rosen really began to recognize the materials that spoke to her as clearly as the birds do now. She began to sculpt using blocks of discarded stones and marble, developing a lifelong concern with using recycled materials, rather than extracting things from the earth. "We are killing our planet," she says with passion. "I want to use what is already in nature and not destroy what's left of it. I don't take anything out of the earth."

While working amid seasoned Portuguese stone masons, she discovered not only her preferred materials as a sculptor, but also the very environment in which she felt most productive: outdoors. Sculpting, chiseling, drilling outside revealed a methodology she continues to embrace today, using one of her three outdoor terraces to work daily. "In Portugal, when I was working with materials in the very face of the sun, I could follow the movement of a form I was undertaking, have it tell me what it wanted to be."

But it was during a later trip to Northern California, where she had come for a sabbatical, that she metaphorically resculpted her own life. Despite being a sociable, gregarious New Yorker, Rosen had an epiphany: "I knew from my work that I needed to live in a place where nature was larger than culture." Upon realizing and reckoning with the fact that she was then not going to be "a New York artist," she instead embraced the wild, moody Western landscape where she has lived and worked since the early 1990s. It's through the solitude and silence that Rosen hears and realizes the forms that define her oeuvre.

She likes glass, stone, and marble because she considers them "alive." They possess an intrinsic animation and complexity that never feel static to her, especially since the pieces she uses had lives before as building parts. "I love the alchemy of those materials," she emphasizes. Rosen cites the sculpture of Brancusi as being among her chief inspirations—works that manage to be both abstract and realistic at the same time, as are hers. When asked, as she often is, whether her works are either abstract or realistic, given that their essential forms are immediately recognizable, and yet not completely, she says, sounding not unlike an oracle, "Great art produces a question and not an answer. The minute you have an answer, you stop looking at the art."

No one has stopped looking at Rosen's art. ■