



REGARDING STEIN'S *KNIGHTS AND GLYPHS*

An essay by Joan Marter ¹

Knights: Power and Vulnerability

Living and working in TriBeCa, Linda Stein found herself in a disaster zone on September 11, 2001. Residents of lower Manhattan were horrified as office workers fell from the flaming World Trade Towers. Stein was evacuated from her studio, and not able to return for several months. To this day she cannot walk past the "Ground Zero" site. I live in Manhattan, and share her grief, her outrage, and her anxiety about life in a beleaguered and threatened city. New Yorkers ride the subways, and try to remain calm when they hear police sirens. Yet they regularly experience uncertainty about their safety.

Not surprisingly, Linda Stein's sculpture has taken a new and very dramatic direction since 9/11. Armored figures have appeared in her art—not the "knights of yore," but female warriors as symbols of protection in an increasingly hostile environment. Like classical torsos, they are sculptural fragments in the tradition of the Venus de Milo. Such ancient figures convey strength and vitality within the body trunk itself. Stein's figures are similarly powerful. Encrusted with materials (figs. 4-5) ² that can be viewed as either symbolic or defensive, these sculptures



LEFT: Fig. 4. *Knight of Winged Words 524*. 2005. wood, metal, stone. 46" x 14" x 5" Falik Collection.

RIGHT: Fig. 5. Detail of *Knight of Winged Words 524*.

have a dazzling visual effect. One figure in wood seems to hold up her arms in a protective position across her upper body. Others fuse leather and fiber with dynamism and force. Stein has incorporated many materials: copper, brass, steel wire, wood, metal pipes, and stone fragments. There is a suggestion of the rubble from fallen buildings, or debris resulting



from an explosive force, that has been appropriated to arm these figures. Script, coins, hardware, and calligraphic plates are also to be found, and these elements suggest an emerging life—a strength that is salvaged from the ruins.

Larger-than-life, Stein's figures are both vital and vulnerable. While they convey femaleness, some with breasts and curving torsos, they are monumentally postured and unyielding. Previously Linda Stein created sculptures of wood, metal and stone fused with steel machete blades, transforming violent weapons into linear rhythms and powerful imagery. Here Stein's figures combine their nudity with the materials of urban experience. Their protective body empowers them, and assures these remarkable images a continuing relevance in our world.

Glyphs: Evocative Fragments and Secret Narratives

As with her current *Knights*, Linda Stein's previous sculpture series *Glyphs*, also evokes artifacts of bygone civilizations. Her brilliant metal objects are a voyage of discovery actually derived from our own world. The secret narratives of these found objects are literally embedded in the works. Stein wants them to appear as though discovered in their current state, but transformed from their original, more mundane, purposes. She makes the surfaces of her constructed works come alive with the vivid color range of metals fully explored. Sculptural constructions feature word fragments, found objects, and

LEFT: Figs. 6-7. Details of *Vertical Energy 365*.

RIGHT: Fig. 8. *Vertical Energy 365*. 2001.

wood, metal, stone. 54" x 17" x 9" Goldberg Collection



occasionally sounds emitted through mechanical devices. Stein's production includes wall panels, mysterious boxes, and talisman-like objects.

With her complex sculptures, Linda Stein comments on the power and variability of objects. Detritus, no longer deemed useful, are rescued from a discarded state and given new empowerment. Stein leads her viewers to rediscover the wonder and enchantment of everyday fragments that are embedded like jewels into the metal surfaces she creates. Some of the found objects have prosaic origins—like small mechanical devices (parts of a clock, for example), drawer knobs, or engraving plates. But they are combined to create a new reality, a



powerfully fresh identity provided by Stein's imagination. Always there is a sense of mystery, an alchemical process that changes the commonplace into something wondrous. And a glyphic language emerges from a close examination of these sculptures—a broken narrative that needs to be deciphered.

TOP: Fig. 9. *Two Women Standing* 322. 1999. wood, metal, stone. 37" x 24" x 16" Siemens Collection
 BOTTOM: Fig. 10. *Overlay* 219. 1994, 1999. wood, metal, stone. 32" x 38" x 8"



LEFT: Fig. 11. *Stability* 222. 1993, 1999. wood, metal, stone. 78" x 24" x 4". McCue/Velayo Collection
 RIGHT: Fig. 12. *Lucky Charm* 210. 1993. wood, metal, stone, bone. 29" x 54" x 7"

While at some distances these wall friezes of polished metals and active surfaces may dazzle, it is only on careful inspection, from a more intimate distance, that their secret narratives are revealed. These puzzling forms include phrases, words, and a rich array of objects with multiple associations. Personal narratives for the artist are undoubtedly incorporated, but Stein also opens up the possibility of narratives derived from the viewer's experience of the work. Like artifacts that will remain as a record of our age, these sculptures await excavation. Through them, the viewer dreams and imagines—bringing poetry to the prosaic. □

