



TODAY'S
MASTERS

BY DAVID MASELLO

MAKING TIME WITH SCULPTOR DIANA REUTER- TWINING



Diana Reuter-Twining (b. 1951) has powers unlike most people. As a sculptor, she has the ability to alter, if not start and stop, time. As a trained architect and, for years now, a prolific practicing sculptor, she notes, “Architects and sculptors both have the ability to manipulate time. An architect can strategically place a stair, window, or volume to slow down the participant’s experience, while a sculptor can encourage the viewer to walk around a piece through gesture, rhythm, scale, and color.”

Mandolin, 2014, fused nylon, copper, and nickel on aluminum base (edition of 9), 5 1/2 x 32 x 13 in.





Tyto, 2013, bronze on solid steel base (edition of 9), 65 1/2 x 13 x 12 in.



After Munnings, 2021, bronze (with color patina) on wooden base (edition of 9), 19 x 26 x 13 in. ■ (BELOW) ALFRED MUNNINGS (1878–1959), *Ned Osborne on Grey Tick*, c. 1913, oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in., private collection, photo courtesy of Sotheby's, London



Furthermore, Reuter-Twining understands the fragmentary, itinerant quality of time — how what occurs suddenly ends just as quickly. So adept is she at capturing the most ephemeral, fleeting moments of life that to look at her trademark bronze horses in motion is to sense the flexing of their muscles. A sculpted owl, perched on an orb, is a blink-of-its-eye away from opening its wings and diving to snatch prey. And a playful rabbit, akin to those found on carousel rides, appears to be mid-stride, as if the breeze of its passing could be felt.

Works in Reuter-Twining's *Water* series, however, seem to not only stop time, but also give geometric shape to it. There, set in bronze, we see the precise geometry of rippled water in the wake left by a mandarin duck skimming a pond surface, while in another work entitled *Mandolin*, she uses polished nickel to record the overlapping concentric circles created by two ducks swimming around one another. Some of the phenomena we might see in nature are now cast in metal, keeping such sights forever memorable.

Maybe it's because Reuter-Twining lives on a family farm in Virginia an hour outside her native Washington, D.C., that she has a special appreciation for the unfolding of nature and how animals, in particular, occupy the land. "My husband and I purchased what was once a cattle farm that has been in my family for 250 years," she explains. Their farm, Bull Run, was part of the thousand-acre Glenstone Farm,

near the site of an infamous Civil War battle. "We bought one hundred acres to live on and subsequently put it into easement, which speaks to my interest in preserving habitats. That land will be left as open, undeveloped. It is our wish that we maintain the habitats that these farms offer to wildlife, as well as explore new methods of organic farming and propagator meadows. We are all here for a very short period of time, and what we leave behind we leave behind forever."

When she was a girl, Reuter-Twining and her family lived in two places — Washington during the school year, and what was then her paternal grandparents' farm in the summer. "My parents collected Andre Harvey's sculptures, and it was because of this that it occurred to me that sculpture was a contemporary art form and not simply an historic reference." But in the Virginia countryside, she recalls, "Life assumed a slower pace and we children had to find ways to entertain ourselves. You'd watch the building of a bird's nest, then see the eggs being laid, then watch them hatch."

Her father instilled in her a love of, and respect for, nature that is now embodied in her finished sculptures. He was not only a surgeon, but also a much-coveted freelance photographer for *National Geographic*, assignments for which took him to exotic locales, notably in East Africa. "My father focused on birds and I would help him by holding lights and building blinds to take pictures of them in the



Maestro, 2014, bronze on bronze base (edition of 9), 26 x 20 x 7 in.

trees, both here on the farm and when we traveled together in the 1960s."

Reuter-Twining and her husband share a love of the natural world. Prior to her meeting Ned Twining in 1991, he served on the board of governors of the Wilderness Society. Soon they embarked on a five-year mission with South African National Parks to teach that country's previously disadvantaged citizens to "become stewards of their own community lands." She says, "Our goal was to train them to become park rangers. When I met Ned, he reinforced all that I had been taught as a child. And then, as I developed as a sculptor, I realized I could be an even more effective steward of nature through my art."

A FARM LIFE

Reuter-Twining's daily "commute" involves going from a circa-1800 house on her property (which she restored fully by utilizing her architectural training) to a barn that serves as her working studio and a space for displaying finished works that are for sale. "So much of being an artist," she says, "is about storage, for materials and for finished works. There are the sheer logistics of sculpture — about having materials ready and, in my case, having armatures ready on which I can build."

There's also the factor of sculpture being a messy medium. Reuter-Twining's bronze and polished aluminum sculptures begin exclusively with oil-based clay, as opposed to water-based versions. Since oil-based clays never fully harden, one could, theoretically, work them for years. "Because of my strong tactile sense and approach, I am fascinated by form and volume and texture and pattern and composition. I really like drawing in 3D, which is what sculpture is."

Reuter-Twining possesses an uncanny ability to engage people right away with her works, a dynamic not unlike a novelist grabbing the attention of a reader with the first sentence. "Once I have an idea, I go whole hog on getting it done," she explains, "gathering information: what is the big idea of the piece, what do I want it to say, and how do I say it effectively? If you don't capture someone's attention quickly, the piece isn't successful."

People linger over Reuter-Twining's pieces not only because her animals and creatures appear so lifelike and animated, but also because of the scale in which they are rendered. "Sculpture, unlike painting," she observes, "can approximate a human scale. I can



Ko Phi Phi, 2008, bronze on stainless steel base (edition of 100), 6 3/4 x 21 x 5 in.

enlarge something, make it 10 times its actual size, perhaps, to hold someone's attention." While many of her horses are not life-size, they have the effect of such.

One of her most notable works is *Tyto*, named for a genus of barn owl. Reuter-Twining has positioned the finished bronzes, in two sizes, on towering plinths; one measures nearly 11 feet and the other nearly six. One of the advantages of her metal sculptures is that they are meant to be placed outdoors, and a successful strategy for doing so is to make them monumental in scale and feel. *Tyto* resulted from Reuter-Twining's having taken hundreds of photos of an owl she encountered one day while attending the Artists for Conservation's annual exhibition in Vancouver. Later she focused on a particular moment that shows the owl stretching. "I captured his grace, agility, and strength all in one pose," she emphasizes. "Owls represent for me a recurring theme of mystery. They dwell between darkness and light."

Another figure that assumes that of a still-living creature is a horse that Sir Alfred Munnings (1878–1959) first depicted in his painting *Ned Osborne on Grey Tick* (c. 1913). So taken was Reuter-Twining with this image of a groom exercising his horse that she created *After Munnings*. It renders the animal in bronze — appearing, at once, flexed and in extended trot, both running and halted, the flanks registering its extraordinary musculature and the tail unfurling with the speed at which it moves.

Her *Maestro*, however, is a more sedate horse, in the midst of dressage, a highly choreographed discipline in which horse and rider appear to be in a kind of symbiosis. "Dressage requires extreme strength, grace, balance, and will," Reuter-Twining notes. It was while studying such a horse that she discerned something that Leonardo exploited in his illustrations for *The Divine Proportion*, the so-called Golden Ratio. She went on to depict a horse astride a plinth in which she has excised, in its base, the lines and circles that articulate the (Golden) ratio. "I chose to pay homage to this in my sculpture." *Maestro* is named for a close friend's horse, a specimen so dignified and well built that it served as her model.

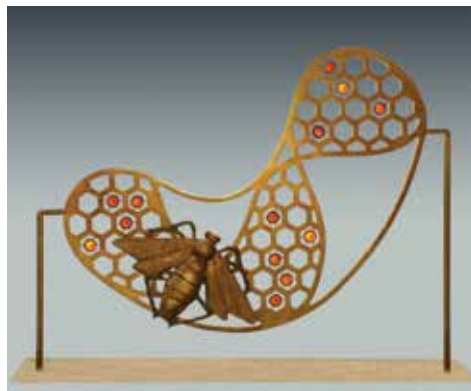
Reuter-Twining can work on a more diminutive scale, too, fashioning jewelry that incorporates other natural motifs, including a honeycomb, grasshoppers, and a fox whose eyes are lit with green jewels. Her *objets d'art* include a frog perched on a bowl, a vase featuring a locust motif, and doorknockers that replicate pears and rabbits.

ROUTINE MATTERS

Reuter-Twining is a rigorously disciplined artist who, prior to working in her studio, begins each day by walking her dog. "An hour-long walk with Cooper, my English springer spaniel, clears my mind," she says. "I always try to work in the morning, when my mind is fresh. After lunch, I come back to the studio to do desk work. When I see a piece in progress after having been away from it for a while, I can see immediately what's wrong. When working too closely on something, you tend to concentrate only on the small details and don't see the bigger version in front of you."



Carousel Rabbits, 2018, bronze on powder-coated steel base (edition of 3), 72 x 61 x 27 in. ■ (BELOW) *Honey Comb*, 2009, bronze on stainless steel base (edition of 9), 60 x 70 x 16 in.



Cooper remains with Reuter-Twining while she works in the studio and listens to classical music or books on tape. She rarely works in silence. “I recently listened to *Hamnet*, Maggie O’Farrell’s novel about Shakespeare’s son, and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, two books that represented to me the most incredible writing.” She insists, too, on working alone. “I love the fact that I have, literally and figuratively, a space to occupy that nobody will interrupt. I have total control that way. You have to be alone, or want to be alone, to be an artist.”

And like a true artist, Reuter-Twining feels that she has no choice but to be one. “I have a drive to create. It started as a little girl when I had a darkroom and my own camera and the ability to develop the shots on my own.” At 19, she went to Paris and earned a degree in art history through Hollins University. Later, she enrolled at the Catholic University of America in her hometown, where she earned a master’s degree in architecture. “I always wanted to be an architect, but I grew up in an age when there were not many women in the field. I graduated at 30 and became a practicing architect. That was my way to fulfill my drive to create. If I’m not creating every day, I feel out of balance.”

Reuter-Twining shifted to fine art when her husband encouraged her to produce a sculpture she had designed. Soon she enrolled in the Corcoran School of Art, then at Colorado’s Loveland Academy of Art and Arizona’s Scottsdale Artists’ School. At these institutions she was able to refine her skills in painting and sculpture during workshops with such masters as Greg Beecham, Matt Smith, Richard Greeves, Michael Coleman, Eugene Daub, and David Turner. Today her works can be found in the permanent collections of Brookgreen Gardens

(South Carolina), the National Sporting Library and Museum (Virginia), Western Kentucky University, Bryn Mawr College, and Loudoun County Parks (Virginia).

LARGER CONTEXTS

Reuter-Twining says her eye was formed powerfully by the grandeur of vision that characterizes Washington, D.C. She has always found inspiration in such great sculptures as Rudolph Evans’s *Thomas Jefferson* inside the Jefferson Memorial and Daniel Chester French’s *Seated Lincoln* at the Lincoln Memorial, and she fondly recalls her once-daily drives across the Memorial Bridge, which is framed by Leo Friedlander’s *Arts of War (Valor and Sacrifice)* and by James Earle Fraser’s *Music and Harvest*.

Given this perspective, it makes sense that Reuter-Twining has strong opinions on abstraction, particularly in sculpture. “I can honestly say that I have a problem with a lot of it,” she confides of the kind of monumental abstractions that populate many sculpture parks and office plazas. “It lacks discipline and it lacks craftsmanship. I get annoyed because I think most of those works are about shock value.”

As for architectural “isms”, Reuter-Twining is equally outspoken. She embraces what many in academia might consider a controversial view — she likes postmodern architecture, that style that emerged in the 1970s and ’80s in reaction to the earlier rigors of modernism, including brutalism. “Thank God for it,” she laughs. “Postmodernism is drawn from historical references,” and she counts such talents as Charles Moore, Aldo Rossi, and Robert Venturi among its best practitioners. During the 1950s and ’60s, art and architecture schools routinely taught only modernist ideals, ignoring historical precedents. “In the ’60s, architectural education was in free fall. We need to draw from the past. A lot of abstraction of the era is the result of artists having, basically, no formal art education.” She cites some abstraction that moves her, however, including sensuously curved works by Henry Moore and Georgia O’Keeffe.

Reuter-Twining is very aware not only of her art and its place in the sculptural canon, but also of women’s place in the art world generally. She points out that female artists comprise, at most, 3 to 5 percent of the permanent holdings of museums in the U.S. “My career changed dramatically when I became a member of American Women Artists,” she says, referencing her role there as president from 2017 to 2020. “It was through this organization that I found my own voice. AWA’s commitment to the core mission of inspiring, encouraging, and celebrating women in the visual fine arts was there when I was ready. I feel very strongly about getting the work of women artists into the permanent collections of accredited museums throughout the United States.”

Given her oeuvre, her large following, and the sheer durability of her works, Reuter-Twining is already changing the very agenda of contemporary sculpture and the role women occupy in that medium. In keeping with one of her aesthetic priorities, it’s about time. ●

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