

AN ELEVATED NATURE

Jane Rosen's Art Explores the Essence of Animals

BY BRETT WILBUR



"Dark Amber," hand-painted archival pigment print.

A raven with a limp slides off an oak branch to perch on artist Jane Rosen's patio railing to examine an afternoon snack of rice. "Mama Raven" isn't thrilled with the grains today, so Rosen heads into her kitchen for some tastier offerings. "You don't like the rice, do you want chicken?" she asks. The raven affirms noisily.

Rosen laughs. "There comes a certain point in the day where it's like, 'Give me the chicken! I'm not vegan!'"

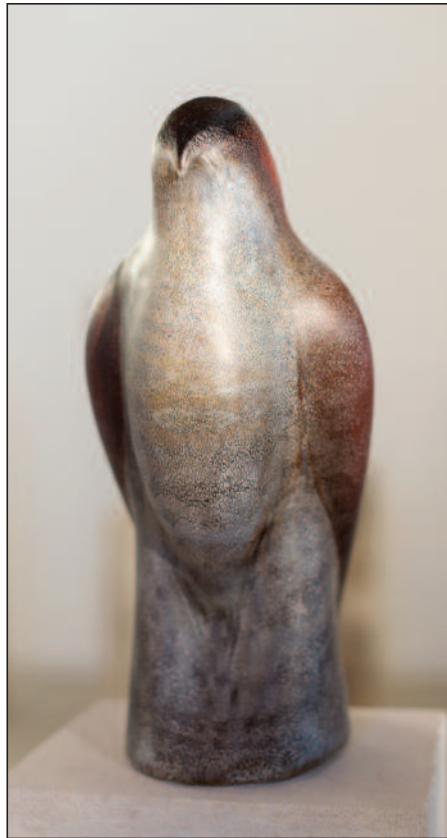


"Moss Morandi," limestone and hand-blown glass elements.

Rosen's Northern California ranch in San Gregorio, near the town of Half Moon Bay, has more animal than human neighbors, although musician Neil Young's place is down the road. It's a far cry from her hyper-urban New York roots, where she was once referred to as "the mayor of SoHo."

Horses have lived on the 40-acre property, though not currently, and Rosen's dogs amble along with her as she creates her renowned paintings, prints and sculpture in a large, light filled studio. Animals, especially birds, figure prominently in her choice of subject matter; but as Rosen explains, "it's not bird portraiture."

"The work is not about animals in the sense of making wildlife art," she says. "It really is about the forces of nature and the experiences I have in nature and relating it to the experiences and



"Picasso Bird 2," hand-blown pigmented glass and limestone.

history I have in art and science, and how these things dialogue."

Decades back, after a sold-out show on 57th Street in Manhattan, Rosen, also a college art professor at top universities, came out to California at Thanksgiving to visit her brother, a Stanford surgeon.

"We were driving to the beach and I looked at San Gregorio and this huge thing came over me and I said, 'Joe, I want to live there.' He said, 'Don't be ridiculous, no one lives there. Cows live there.'"

Describing it as a "mythic" experience, through friends of friends, Rosen traded art for a stay at a local horse ranch and took a sabbatical.

"I was looking up at a redtail hawk and I heard a voice as clear as day: 'Stay here and tell your story.' Tears started pouring down my face.



"Wax Gypsy with Coopers," casein, wax and ink.



Studio Install photograph for "Light Morph/Dark Morph" show at Gail Severn Gallery, Sun Valley, Idaho.



Left: "Cave Bird," hand-blown pigmented glass and beau maniere limestone. Right: "Hawk and Buddhi," casein, conte, mixed media.

I'm this New York intellectual and don't know anything about living in the country. But it's almost as if the story needed to be told by somebody with New York training so it wouldn't look like Western art. It needed to be told in a way so people who have the ability to protect wildlife will buy my art and see what I see and protect them."

For awhile, Rosen split time between New York and the horse ranch, and then two days before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, she sold her New York loft and used the money to purchase a ranch down the road from the one she had been borrowing.

"When I first came here, it was so quiet at night," she recalls. "There were no cars, and I heard

this sound and it was like, 'Oh shit! Somebody is breaking in!' I felt like Jerry Lewis in a Zen monastery. Like, 'Oh my GAWD!' And then I realized the sound was my heartbeat! I mean, who would hear your heartbeat in New York?"

Rosen's inspiration comes from as diverse sources as Leonardo da Vinci, Egyptian funer-

ary art, Asian calligraphy and Renaissance drawing techniques.

When asked how all her insight and synchronicities inform her work, she answers, "I think it is my work. I start with drawing from observation. I'm a Leonardo da Vinci kind of gal. The drawing starts to bring up these forms that I think are almost abstract. When you look at a hawk posted on a telephone pole, you are not sure if it's a hawk or a transformer. It's that moment when you recognize a Great Blue Heron is not a stick in the ground. Drawing gets you to the essence of form."

'I was looking up at a redtail hawk and I heard a voice as clear as day: "Stay here and tell your story."'

Rosen studied animal and human anatomy and glass blowing techniques from experts (though she leaves the actual glass blowing to others) in order to create sculptural forms, from horse hooves to still-lives reminiscent of artist Giorgio Morandi, to birds made of glass and crystal mixed with limestone and other materi-

als, that have made her famous.

Locally, her work is available at the Chris Winfield Gallery in Carmel.

"She captures an essence of the birds," Winfield says. "The glass is wonderful and translucent and she often puts it on boulders. There's a primitive response to nature that goes way back to the first carvings."

Rosen pictures the beautiful proportions of birds posted on branches like monks or the Virgin Mary.

"My studio is like a cathedral," she says. "I firmly believe in God and I really feel nature is God's

cathedral. I very much wish for my work to remind people of a stillness and a quiet in themselves. Too much art tells us about the bad news first. After 40 years in New

York, I know the bad news. I want work that can lead us to the possibility of good news. And there is good news."

Jane Rosen's sculptures, paintings and prints are available at the Winfield Gallery, located on Dolores between Ocean and 7th in Carmel. 831/624-3369 or visit www.winfieldgallery.com. ■