

Sculptor Jane Rosen shares her
enthusiasm for art, teaching, and
the San Gregorio hillside.

A Keen Perspective

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In folklore, the hawk is considered a messenger from the angels sent to signal a time in your life when you need to focus on what's ahead and prepare for a leadership role, flying higher than ever before.

Perhaps then, the red-tailed hawk that New York Artist Jane Rosen saw circling above the San Gregorio hills during a fortuitous visit decades ago, was just such a messenger, delivering his wisdom to her receptive spirit. At 67 years young, Jane indeed has soared for more than 20 years here in Northern California as both a beloved mentor for her art students at Davis, Berkeley, and Stanford, as well as a well-renowned sculptor whose imposing stone-carved hawk figures are prized by collectors all over the world.

I first heard of Jane Rosen from a friend, who only dared to dream of owning one of her sculptures, which sell for upwards of \$80,000+. In the process of opening my first art gallery, I was looking for art to fill my space and he encouraged me to check out Jane's work at www.janerosen.com—as unpretentious and

direct a URL as one can have (much like the artist herself, as I would soon learn).

Impressed by the elegance of her work, I completed the "Contact" form on her website, conveying both my admiration and my desire to feature her work in my yet-to-be-launched gallery. "Would you be interested?" I asked, leaving my contact information. Within minutes my cell phone rang. Much to my surprise, it was Jane Rosen, who sounded a bit bemused but mostly annoyed by the audacity of my request. Given the stature of her talent, Jane was only represented by well-heeled art dealers, like Gail Severn of Sun Valley and, closer to home, Chris Winfield in Carmel.

But as I sputtered apologies for my *naïveté*, I sensed a shift in her tone. The story of a 50-something, single mother of three teenagers hoping to re-imagine herself as a first-time gallery owner, spoke to Jane's heart—a New York heart softened by her years in California where she grew to love the land and all creatures upon it. I had awakened the mentor in Jane and she began sharing her wisdom about the art world with me—how do I turn an artist's priceless passion into a successful business?



After exchanging a few more emails and phone calls, I had gained an ally and even managed to finagle a rare invitation to her studio, secluded on the 40 acres she now calls home in San Gregorio.

Meeting Jane for the first time is an intimidating experience. Her quick wit and New York bravado show no mercy for weakness. As I entered the light-filled studio, admiring the soaring ceilings and the minimalist style of an Amish-country barn, I could sense the hawk-eyed scrutiny, not only from my host and her trusted assistant and fellow artist Alexander Rohrig, but also from a room full of raptors—majestic hawks delicately captured in limestone, marble, and crystal—magnificent in person.

Today, Jane knows she could never manage the six-hour daily commute from San Gregorio to Davis, but back then, the newly transplanted New Yorker relished the stress and anxiety of her harried lifestyle. More importantly, she thrived as a teacher. With no children of her own, Jane was devoted to her students. “I didn’t start making work at this level until I stopped teaching because I gave so much of my energy to my students,” she says. “I’d walk into a classroom of 20 or 30 students and I’d say, ‘One of you may change the world and have greatness. I don’t know which one, so I’m going to work you all as if you are ‘The One.’” Her devotion to her students was equally reciprocated. She recalls the story of a student whose year-end teacher evaluation

muscle manhandling the tonnage of stone Jane requires for her work. In turn, she boasts about the success of Alex’s first art show with her dealer, Gail Severn, noting that he sold nine of his paintings.

Living Her Truth

As devoted as she was to her students during her teaching tenure, Jane readjusted her priorities when her beloved dog Mayo became ill and was given six months to live. “I had to make a choice. I could continue teaching for another year and receive full retirement with benefits for life, or I could spend the next six months with Mayo.” In 2006, Jane walked away from

Jane’s signature form may be the hawk, but the artist still loves to experiment, translating that form to various mediums—paper, stone, glass. Like any worthy craftsman, Jane values her tools—from the diamond blade power tool she wields to rough out the initial shape to the immense selection of mallets and precision chisels she uses for more detailed work. A contemplative process, working with stone is much slower than working with clay or plaster and can take weeks, months, or even years to complete a piece. The artist patiently sits, waits, and listens to what the stone is asking of her. “You have to be very clear about what you’re taking away,” she insists, “because you could take away too much or the stone could break and there’s no going back.”



A Depth of Talent

Born in New York in 1950, Jane studied fine art at New York University, graduating with honors in 1972. She soon began teaching at the renowned School of Visual Arts, but still made sure she had time to draw and sculpt, showing at the prestigious Grace Borgenicht Gallery on 57th Street.

While visiting her brother, a physician at Stanford, Jane fell in love with the coastal oak-brush-covered hills just west of Palo Alto. With a sabbatical offered as a carrot, Jane came to the West Coast to write the *School of Visual Art Drawing Manual*. However, the book was placed on hold when Jane accepted a teaching position at UC Davis, at a time when the campus hosted such stellar talent as Robert Arneson, Manuel Neri, Roy De Forest, and Wayne Thiebaud.

read, “Jane Rosen is a foul-mouthed, smoking New Yorker. Would you think I was crazy if I told you I would follow her anywhere to be under her tutelage?”

Jane admits that she was shocked by the commentary, not realizing she cursed as much as she did. “I’m much better now but I still don’t know how to be polite,” she claims. Jane believes her lack of a “brain-to-mouth filter” makes her an even better teacher. “I will not tell my students their work looks good if it doesn’t,” she says.

Sitting by quietly, Alex reaffirms Jane’s no-holds-barred honesty, even when critical. “Jane’s really good at seeing what you need before you realize that you need it,” he says appreciatively. The relationship between artist and assistant is symbiotic. Jane depends on Alex for his insight, creativity, and a bit of

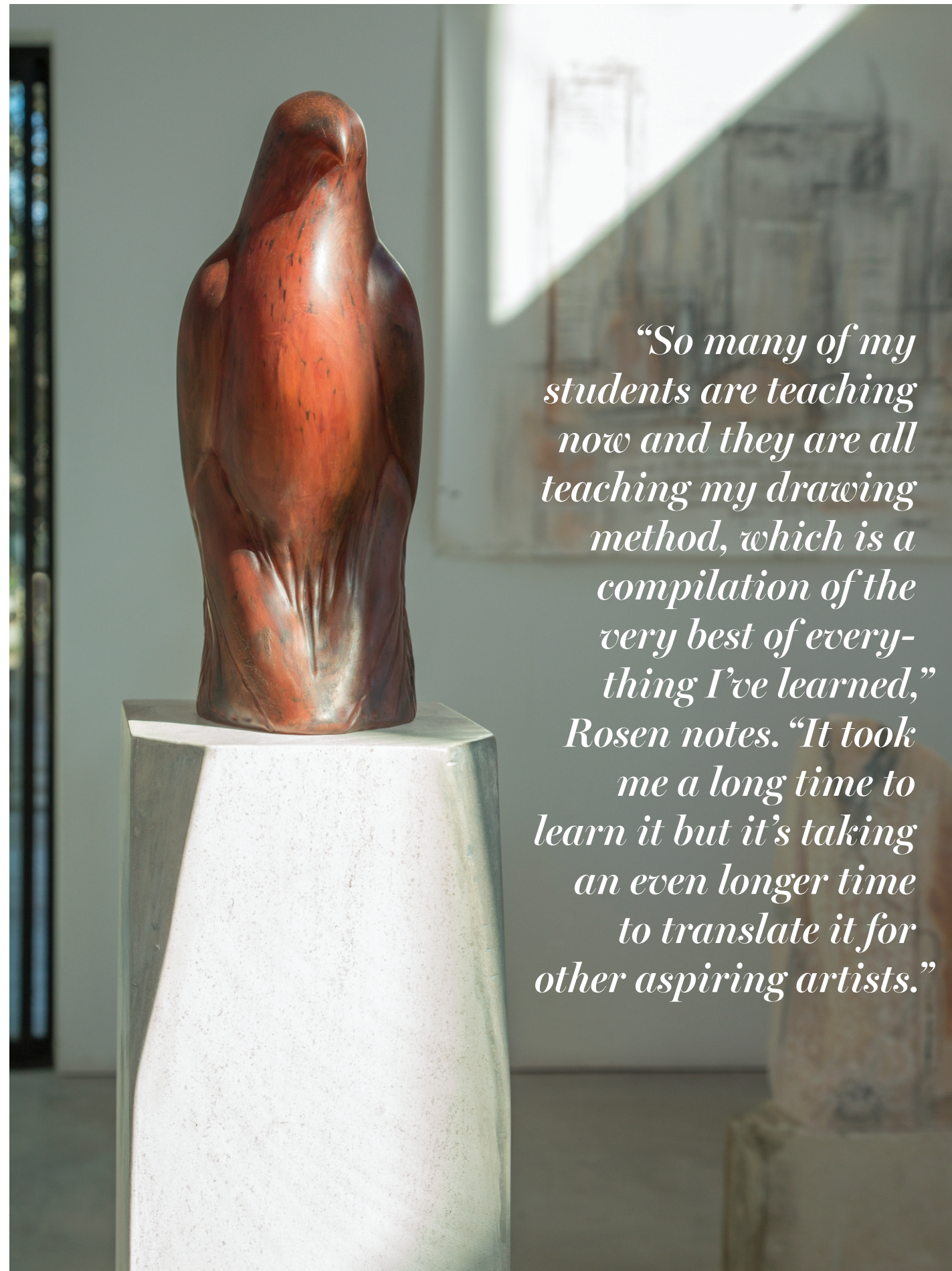
full retirement (and a regular paycheck) to spend time with her best friend.

“It didn’t occur to me that I had to come up with that money to pay my bills,” she says. “Here I am in the middle of nowhere dependent on an art career. My artist friends in New York thought I was crazy.”

But there was no need to worry. Jane’s talent prevailed. She was able to sell out a show at Grace Borgenicht Gallery in NYC, a first for the accomplished professor. Design icon Ralph Lauren bought five of her horse prints for himself and rock legend Eddie Van Halen owns two of her sculptures. Her works are housed in the homes of personal collectors, museums, and corporations across the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. Yes, even the U.S. Embassy in Tunis, Tunisia, boasts a Jane Rosen original.

Alex elaborates, “Sometimes you might uncover an embedded fossil or iron deposit that causes the stone to break in an unfortunate way, but sometimes the break can be helpful.” Jane agrees, recalling a piece that fell off once while working on the wing of a bird that happened to create a perfect shell with its shape and markings.

Jane first began working with stone during a six-week stint in Portugal. She was one of five artists who received a grant from the Portuguese government (and the token woman) to work alongside the country’s master marble craftsmen. Her host cautioned her to be patient, saying that “the stone knows no master.” That simple advice was a great gift, she says, “because before we were trying to muscle it but then we realized we needed to take our time and listen to the stone.”



“So many of my students are teaching now and they are all teaching my drawing method, which is a compilation of the very best of everything I’ve learned,” Rosen notes. “It took me a long time to learn it but it’s taking an even longer time to translate it for other aspiring artists.”

Ready to Soar

Looking ahead, Jane says she’s just getting started. “I’d love to have a museum retrospective of all my work from the 1980s to now all in one place,” she muses. “I’ve saved enough work from each period to make that possible.”

Most recently, Jane was featured as one of five Northern California women sculptors in a special exhibit at the Sonoma Museum of the Art entitled, *Forge & Stone: Contemporary California Women Sculptors*, which closes this month. And the raptors



currently filling her studio were flying off to the Sears-Peyton Gallery in New York.

However, it’s her role as “art mother” to a never-waning stable of both established and aspiring artists that continues to motivate her. This yearning to share her knowledge with others inspires her to revisit that unfinished project from years ago—the figurative drawing manual. “So many of my students are teaching now and they are all teaching my drawing method, which is a compilation of the very best of everything I’ve learned,” she notes. “It took me a long time to learn it but it’s taking an even longer time to translate it for other aspiring artists.”

Jane harkens back to the day she first spotted that red-tailed

messenger. “I heard a voice as clear as day telling me to stay here and share my story. I knew I had to be here,” she explains. “The students here needed me a lot more than my students in New York needed me. They never had anyone who was going to work their a** off for them and tell them the truth like I would.”

For Jane Rosen, the call to share what she’s learned never ends, but our meandering afternoon interview does. She graciously sends me on my way with a framed horse painting, entitled *Leonardo with Leaves*, which she hopes will bring me luck for



my gallery opening. As I walk down the hill to my car, I can overhear Jane telling our story to her next guest. “Can you believe she sends me an email out of the blue with balls of steel telling me that she’s opening an art gallery and would love to display my work? So adorable,” she laughs. “Obviously, she doesn’t know anything about running an art gallery but she decided to do it and that’s great.”

I can’t help but wonder if Jane Rosen is my messenger hawk. I sure hope so. ♦

Former senior editor with Gentry Jill Layman just recently opened A.Space, a retail art gallery and private event venue in downtown Menlo Park.