



LEE STOLIAR

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Sculpture

May 12 - June 11, 1988

Opening: Thursday, May 12, 5-7 p.m.

C A R L O

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G A L L E R Y

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L A M A G N A

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*Completer (Zooming to Cythera)*, 1988, terra cotta, 9¼ x 21 x 6 in.

Front cover: *Feeder*, 1988, terra cotta, 9¼ x 21 x 6 in.

Let us start with the art form itself. Deep, modeled, terra cotta bas-reliefs that are so sculptural they seem to jump from the black wooden frames that delimit their peripheries. These modeled forms exude primordial, universal passions. Forms that say, "look at me, I'm truly alive, I define myself by my actions against the forces that attempt to constrain me. I'm, muscular, gritty, and sure of myself, and I do and say all of this in a space of less than one square foot."

What might happen, do you suppose, if the space were suddenly expanded to 4 by 5 feet? Would the power evinced in the smaller work be magnified proportionately or would the change of scale distort it and its impact? Could such a task even be accomplished? The proposed idea called for a bas-relief that would project a full 48 inches out from the vertical plane of the piece. This was a challenge. The very kind of challenge that stimulates Lee Stoliar in both her life and work.

As Stoliar's works are bounded by physical frames, this project was bounded by a time frame. It was the time available in the space rented for the project. In four and a half months of prodigious work, all of the technical problems involved in fabricating a 1900 lb. clay model had to be solved and the work executed. In typical Stoliar fashion it was, and without a day to spare. Now cast in terra cotta colored polyester resin, *Big Telephone* stands as powerful testimony to both her ability to solve major technical problems as well as to the work's ability to withstand the jump in scale.

All of life is conflict and resolution. In *Big Telephone* Stoliar addresses the arena within which conflicts are played out daily by millions—the telephone. Each day, over miles of copper and fibre-optic pathways egos clash in conflict. Where is my order? Will you marry me? Do you want to buy a widget? Did you see what she was wearing?

Is the figure holding the phone a child or an adult? Is the phone being cradled or gripped? Is it someone trying to make a conquest or someone being victimized? What difference

does it make? It's always the interaction between individuals, always the conflict of egos and the hoped-for resolution.

In this, Stoliar's first attempt at enlarging an earlier piece, she has succeeded admirably. More than mere replication, the work assumes a monumentality that astounds the viewer. Advantages of scale are apparent. No longer do we peer into a small stage upon which conflicts ensue, here we're slammed by the event. The scale changes us from dinosaur to Lilliputian; we stand in awe. There is truly no parallel to it in contemporary sculpture.

But Stoliar is interested in new vernaculars as well. The triptych format is now investigated. Using playful alliteration (*Reader, Feeder, and Completer*) we are presented with three pieces which seem, at first viewing, to be unrelated to each other, but which upon further examination appear as a triptych of triptychs.

In *Reader* a man is reading a book in the center panel. He is trying to learn and is deeply absorbed by the activity. The two flanking panels each contain the figure of a woman. On the left a woman as temptress is trying to pull the reader away from his studies. On the right, a woman is attempting to broach the reader's space by unlocking the door that separates them. Both are attempts at intrusion. Are these attempts to attract the man's attention, to involve his consciousness with their presence, or is it rather an attempt to gain equal access to information? Here the conflict is about to ensue and we are witness to it.

In *Feeder* the sexual placements are reversed. This time the woman is in the center panel. She is seen as self-motivated and in the process of presenting food. The flanking male figures are going about the business of working and resting. The male in the left panel is carrying an "I" beam, while the man on the right is resting on a pillow. There is no attempt at intrusion here. The men show no apparent interest in the woman; there is no desire to gain access to her world. Parallel activities dominate and interactions do not exist.

Finally, in *Completer*, a work referring to Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, we see a man and a woman in the center panel. Both are being borne together to the island of Cythera, the island of love. Both will share their hopes, dreams, and aspirations there. Interaction prevails, a melding of shared values; the new relationship for contemporary man and woman.

There are several single panels in the exhibition. All address the subject of women involved with food and its harvesting. One shucks corn, another splits pea pods, a third samples a tomato. Unlike earlier works in which the rectangular frame was positioned horizontally, here most of the axes have been shifted ninety degrees to the vertical. The figures, as a consequence, appear to be less physically compressed. The women are standing firmly on the ground and not floating as before. They appear as Earth Mother types—robust, mature, serene, the conflicts of earlier stages resolved.

In this exhibition, Lee Stoliar's concern for universal ideas is obvious. She takes us on a voyage of conceptual discovery where at every point we are forced to confront themes of conflict and resolution. Her vigor is exciting; there appears to be no limit to it. She is attempting to teach and is using the bas-relief as her educational tool. Each piece is a fragment of a mosaic. But unlike the mosaic, where each piece has no conceptual significance when viewed by itself,

here each fragment stands on its own while simultaneously fitting perfectly into the overall statement.

One is reminded of the bas-reliefs which adorn the Indian Temples first seen during the 4th through 6th centuries of the Gupta period. The temple facades were festooned with terra cotta depictions of Buddhist deities who were portrayed as kings and princes surrounded by the trappings of court life. Later, in the nineteenth century in parts of Bengal, heavily modeled terra cotta bas-reliefs of royal ladies attending to their toilet formed much of the adornment on these temples.

But this work was contrived, stylized, and unvarying, shaped as it was by the restrictions of religious tradition. Here one may not find delight in the generation of new ideas or universal truths unfettered by stylistic, interpretive constraints. All is proscribed, written down in an invariant iconography.

Fortunately for us, the gallery of today makes no such demands. All is left to the interpretive skills of the artist: the choice of subject matter, the use of materials, and the scale. We can only be delighted that Lee Stoliar has chosen to refer to this ancient sculptural tradition as a platform for her truly unique and highly developed interpretive art. We look forward with much anticipation to the sharing of her next voyage of discovery.

Judith S. Schwartz, Ph.D.



*Big Telephone* (model), 1987, terra cotta on armature, 48 x 60 x 48 in.