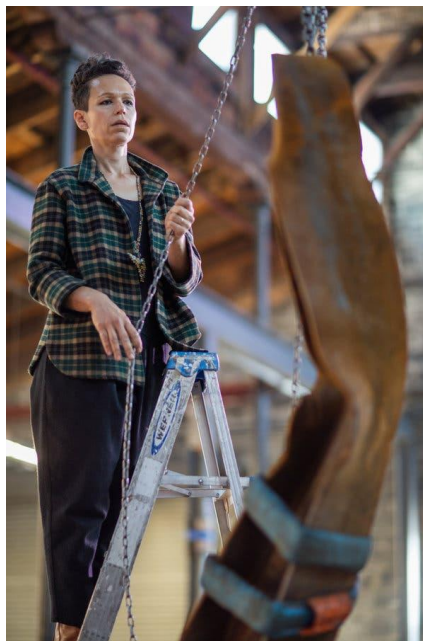


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Sculpture's Woman of Steel, Carol Bove

Randy Kennedy



The sculptor Carol Bove working on a piece in her studio in Red Hook, Brooklyn. The studio feels more like a factory floor than like an artist's nest. Credit...Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

A visit to the sculptor Carol Bove's studio in a former brick factory near the Brooklyn waterfront does not exactly make Rimbaud's advice for the true artist — to engage in a “boundless and systematized disorganization of all the senses” — leap to mind. A huge manufacturing floor dominated by an overhead gantry that looks as if it could hoist a subway car, the place instead evokes distinctly unpoetic phrases like “productivity gains” and “customer fulfillment strategies.”

But Ms. Bove, 45, whose pieces have become widely celebrated in recent years, collected by the Museum of Modern Art and shown at the Venice Biennale, is also known to keep a small trampoline in the studio, one of her esoteric strategies for “dissolving my sense of separateness from the world,” as she describes the prison of habitual, or even rational, thinking. In an essay she wrote last year for younger artists, she added that over the years, she has also tried out “Ayurvedic principles, philosophy, Feldenkrais technique, anthropology, astrology, the physiology of perception, contemplating life as a cave man, health-food regimens, psychedelic

experiences, reading self-help books, eBay, falling in love, practicing magical rites” and “the scientific tradition,” among other freeing approaches from a deep therapeutic grab bag. “I don’t want my work to be reduced to my personality,” she said in a recent interview. “I want it to be my self, which I think of as something much larger.”



Carol Bove's "Hylomorph I" (2016). Credit...Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

The most recent work to emerge from these inquiries — which goes on view on Saturday in Ms. Bove’s first New York solo show at the [David Zwirner gallery](#) — seems to channel spirits from the pantheon of heavy-metal 20th-century sculptors, a he-man group (it is almost exclusively male) that includes John Chamberlain, Tony Smith, Alexander Liberman and Anthony Caro.

Ms. Bove, who also has a show of the new sculpture on view through Dec. 23 at the [Maccarone gallery in Los Angeles](#), has been moving toward larger, more imposing work for several years now. But the new pieces — all in steel, some portions rusty and twisted, salvaged from New Jersey scrapyards; and others new, painted to look science-fiction spooky — are the most ambitious of her career, which has so flourished that she recently began moving here from smaller studio spaces in Red Hook, with a staff of 10 to help her manage exhibitions and manipulate the metal.

During a recent visit, she and her assistants had arranged many of the sculptures to mimic the space inside the Zwirner gallery in Chelsea. Ms. Bove (pronounced Bo-VAY) is obsessive about how groups of her pieces work in tandem, almost in the manner of a theater troupe, and how they are experienced — “kind of like walking through a picture,” she said.



Carol Bove's "Daphne and Apollo" (2016). Credit...Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Around this precise tableau lay the kind of oddball raw material and detritus that sometimes makes its way into her work: a salvaged root system from a redwood; a huge block of Styrofoam that looked like quarried stone; a pile of square stainless-steel tubes that she bends, using a 50-ton press, so that they end up looking more like squiggled brush strokes than like industrial metal. "This is maybe a first draft of something," she said, kicking a double-bent column with her dirty white tennis shoe.

The ability to afford what is essentially a huge machine shop has allowed her, perhaps counterintuitively, she said, to make pieces with more spontaneity — "to look as if they're almost easy" — and to continue to have the mental space to think in unconventional ways. It has also allowed her to expand her horizons while staying in Red Hook, where she and her husband, the painter Gordon Terry, have long lived and are raising their two children.

Some of Ms. Bove's earliest pieces, which drew heavily on her upbringing in the Bay Area in the 1970s, were spare Modernist shelves, decorated with domestic knickknacks and a highly particular cross section of books (Hermann Hesse; R. D. Laing; Betty Friedan; "Natural Parenthood," by Eda J. LeShan.) The books evoked a generally optimistic, open period in the counterculture, an interest of Ms. Bove's that continues and edges up to mysticism in her fascination with thinkers like Harry Smith and Lionel Ziprin, the old-time hairy magi of the East Village. The critic Barry Schwabsky wrote in *The Nation* that "the risk of plunging into some sort of hippie-dippy self-delusion comes with the territory that Bove's been exploring."



Carol Bove's studio, a former factory floor in Red Hook, Brooklyn. Credit...Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Laura Hoptman, a curator at the Museum of Modern Art who organized a show of Ms. Bove's work in 2013, said she became interested in her art partly because of that risk. She considers Ms. Bove's forays into big-footprint sculpture to be only superficially riffs on 20th-century forebears. "I had always thought of her as a neo-Modernist," Ms. Hoptman said. "But I came to the realization that that wasn't really it. I started to think that she was more a collector than an appropriator — a collector of talismans. Her pieces might be the children of those earlier sculptors, but they're sprinkled with a different kind of fairy dust."

She added: "There are some people who come from the time of the counterculture, and they reject it, but she's embracing it and inspecting it. She's really drunk her own Kool-Aid."

Ms. Bove allowed about as much. "I don't really believe in the stable self," she said. "If there's a John Chamberlain who wants to come through me, that's fine." Later, she emailed this thought: "Years ago, my grandmother made some diminishing remark to me about Busby Berkeley's achievement, saying that he just copied all of his choreography from a kaleidoscope. But a lot of people have seen a kaleidoscope, and only one person made those dances! Everyone is thoroughly interconnected and everyone is also an individual."

Locating her artistic coordinates on that existential plane is sometimes tricky. "My failure rate with pieces is pretty high," she said, but added that she was also practical enough to understand that bills must be paid. (Prices for her large works are now well into the six figures.) "I think of some pieces as the ones that really aren't going to be able to go out and get a job — they're the poets and the dreamers, and that's O.K. And then there are the others that get out there and earn enough for everybody else. And that's O.K., too."

As the sun was going down outside the studio that afternoon, Ms. Bove said she had decided to surround these new pieces in a kind of uniform gray inside the Zwirner gallery, the rooms painted from floor to ceiling to "make everything physically feel like it's in a state of suspension," an idea that was giving her considerable pleasure. "I think it's going to ride the border of being *really* weird."