

## Jane Rosen @ Braunstein/Quay

by Richard Whittaker  
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Jane Rosen, at the beginning of her career, found herself in the thick of the New York art scene. It was the era when Minimalism ruled, and her early work reflected it. Then one day, she took herself up to the Art Students League and began to study Renaissance drawing technique with Robert Beverly Hale, curator of drawing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

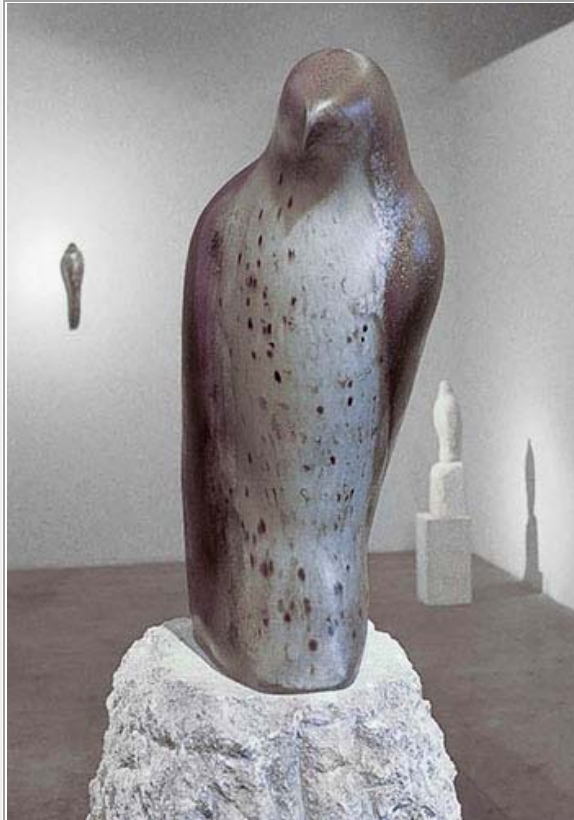
Her move was a sign of what artists are often thought to possess, a spirit of independent inquiry. Rosen graduated from NYU with straight A's in her dual major, art and philosophy. In those days the phrase "art, philosophy and religion"

hadn't quite disappeared from familiar usage. The big questions, which remain with us today in spite of the amazing proliferation of distractions, were not off limits.

In 1988 she was introduced to stone carving through an American Foundation Award that took her to Portugal. Ten years later she began a relationship with glass as an artist in residence at [Pilchuck Glass School](#). Over the years, she's also taught: at the School of Visual Arts in New York, UC Davis, Stanford, Bard and UC Berkeley. Recently, her work was included in the Academy of Arts and Letters Invitational Exhibition in New York, as well as in solo shows at [Sears-Peyton](#) and in galleries in a number of other cities, including [Braunstein/Quay](#) in San Francisco where her work is currently on display through May 7.



Inside Rosen's San Gregorio studio



"Pale Male," 2011, hand blown pigmented glass and limestone 70.5 x 10 x 20"

But something happened that took her away from the kind of success she might have found if she'd pursued her fast start in Manhattan.

She visited the Bay Area where she rented a place on a horse ranch south of Half Moon Bay for six months. The exposure to the beauty of the place—the coast, the hills, the redwoods—made a deep impression. One day, as she stepped out of her house, she looked up and saw a red-tailed hawk soaring above her. “As I stood looking up at the hawk, in a voice as clear as day, I heard these words, ‘*Tell my story*’.”

If, growing up on Long Island, Rosen had appreciated nature in an unself-conscious way, then her experiences in California focused her nascent interest in a new and compelling way.

What is it that nature has to show us if we have the eyes to see it? And what is seeing, anyway?

These are questions Rosen has explored for a long time. Are we really beyond them now? I can imagine Jane laughing at this and saying, “Remember, we still have bodies.”

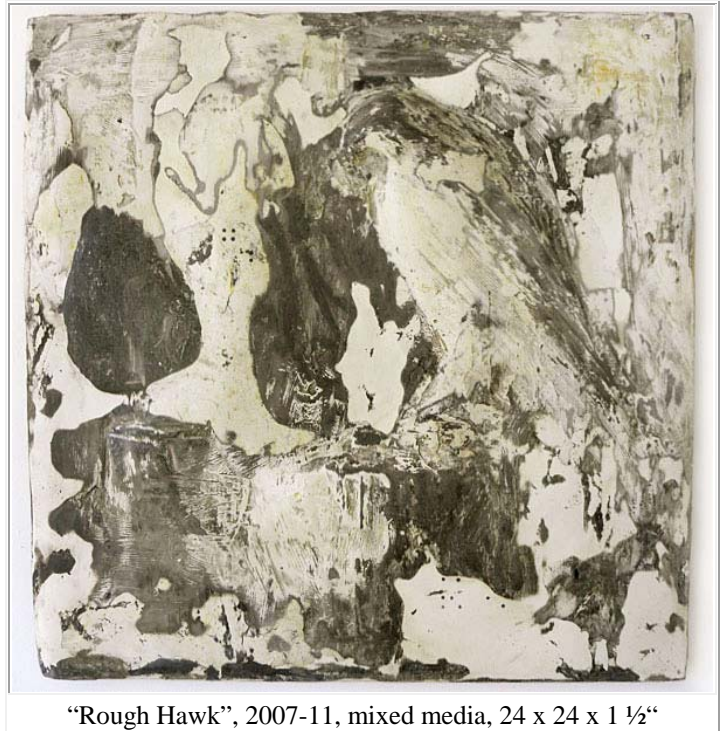
Often in her work one senses a quality of presence. It's no accident. Perhaps something of the intelligence of the body is made visible, an intelligence that also functions in us, but which is mostly buried under the noise and bustle of daily life. And there's another stratum quietly present in many of Rosen's pieces, an unsentimental quality of feeling, and a grace—both in the smooth-surfaced glass figures and in the rough-hewn stone figures.

Rosen's drawings provide another way of making visible what she sees in the animals she watches so closely: the jays, hawks, woodpeckers, ravens, quail, squirrels, hummingbirds, coyotes, foxes, deer, and other animals that are part of her daily life, including her dogs and two horses. Her drawing of a horse, *Ground Tie*, is a strong example of this. It conveys something about inhabiting the body and speaks to the feelings, too.

What Rosen is trying to show is not easily put in words. Her drawing, *Herd Dogs Herding*, is a great example of this. Its hint of something almost ecstatic, and an aura I'm tempted to call religious, is quite surprising.

Rosen is happy to talk about her synesthesia. "I hear shapes," she explains, and further, "I can see with my hands." I've never really grasped how that works, but her art somehow seems to speak directly to our instinctive life. Her stone hawk *Fossil Bird* has its own magical story. As the limestone was being worked, a large piece broke off, a fossil shell, leaving a perfect curve in the hawk's folded wing. Later Rosen's stone vendor was looking at the piece. "Where did you get this stone," he asked. "From you!" Rosen replied. "But it's illegal to ship this kind of stone out of France!" he said. Apparently it had been sold to Rosen by accident. The fossil shell that emerged mysteriously from the stone sits in front of the piece and adds another layer of meaning that's a pure gift.

—RICHARD WHITTAKER



Jane Rosen: "Wild Life" @ [Braunstein/Quay Gallery](#) through May 7, 2011.

Cover image: *Herd Dogs Herding*, 2010, Korean watercolor on Japanese paper, 16 x 28"

#### About the author

Richard Whittaker is the founding editor of *works & conversations* and West Coast editor of *Parabola* magazine.

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