

## Jane Rosen & Ann Hollingsworth @ Seager Gray



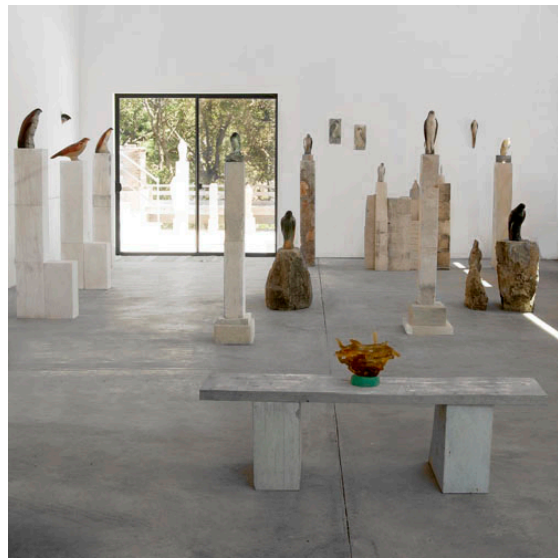
Portraying birds as bare-essence statues, would not, for most artists, be an intuitive choice for valorizing them. Rosen, who makes birds out of blown and cast glass, embraces the contradiction. She sculpts them as the Egyptians did, as inert icons, leaving just enough information in her attenuated shapes so that we can identify them as birds of prey: hawks, falcons, kestrels and kites. Hers are not portraits of individuals. They reveal only generic traits, most notably the poses of nobility that raptors strike when they perch on tree limbs or rocks. Frozen and statuary, but also heraldic in the manner of ancient gargoyles, they signal something far greater than just bird-ness.

That something is time – geologic time. It's evoked by the alchemical process of glass making, which, in Rosen's hands, involves chiseling, grinding and lacing of kiln-cooked organic materials with colored pigments. The birds and the pedestals they stand on look like weatherworn rock. In them we see the transparent glow of amber; intimations of various kinds of metamorphic rock (in particular schist, with its veins of quartz, mica and talc), along with marble, granite and sandstone. The resulting objects convincingly simulate actual rock. Wall-mounted birds, made from blown glass, are more reductive still, their black surfaces recalling Oaxaca pottery, beautiful but inscrutable, save for the heads, which appear alternately alert or sunken in quiet resignation.

Rosen, despite the apparent formality of her works, is a process artist. She discovers the character of her subjects in the act of sculpting them — but not without first undertaking an enormous amount of observation and preparatory sketching, a form at which she excels. It's seen here in finished drawings and prints that, in contrast to the sculptures, describe birds in exquisite detail, their realistic traits modified by loose washes and imprints. They reveal Rosen to be an acute observer of nature, one part Morris Graves, one part Robinson Jeffers, the Carmel poet who in *Hawk and Rock* immortalized in words what Rosen says in stone: "...Fierce consciousness joined with final/Disinterestedness/Life with calm death; the falcon's/ Realist eyes and act/Married to the massive..."

Rosen knows from massive. She grew up in New York and launched a career there. Then she visited the West Coast, fell in love with it and subsequently wound up dividing her time between a Soho loft and the 40-acre horse ranch she now occupies full-time in San Gregorio, 30 miles south of San Francisco. It is, according to published accounts, something of a menagerie, overrun by dogs, horses and wild birds which she attracts by tossing seeds onto an outdoor patio, the better to observe them at close range. Still, a substantial part of her remains in New York. ("It all started with two peregrine falcons on Greene St.," she recalled in recent email exchange.) Indeed, red-tailed hawks, falcons and other raptors have long been known to roost on the lintels and parapets of urban buildings, especially on the Upper West side where, for years, they have enjoyed protected status. Rosen pays tribute to this phenomenon in *The Last Skyscraper*, a five-and-half foot-tall plinth topped by a falcon.

Photographs of the artist's studio reveal many such structures, indicating that in Rosen's oeuvre, the man-nature divide, if it exists at all, is slender. This apparent confluence is embodied in her materials. The layers of the pedestal that support *The Last Skyscraper*, to take but one example, alternate between kiln-cast glass, marble and limestone. The limestone layer resembles concrete, a clear reference to the "built" environment alluded to by the title.



For Ann Hollingsworth, Rosen's casting collaborator, the subject is the homes birds build for themselves; she collects and reproduces them in glass. They emerge from the process looking like woven shards of colored ice: amber, gold and blue. Where Rosen uses the metaphor of flight to visualize geologic time, Hollingsworth uses nests to concretize light, reflecting and refracting it in objects that appear to be electrically charged. They are the product of a circular kind of alchemy, whereby a solid (wood) becomes liquid (molten glass) and then solid again: the spiky objects we see here. Just as Patrick Dougherty turns tree branches into sculptures that read as architecture, Hollingsworth's nests allow us to see avian architecture in a whole new light — *literally*.

—DAVID M. ROTH

"Form & Place: Jane Rosen and Ann Hollingsworth" @ [Seager Gray](#) through November 10, 2013.