ABOUT

Carol Bruns (b. 1943, Des Moines, Iowa) is an artist based in Brooklyn, New York, focusing on sculpture and drawing. She earned a degree in Fine Arts from NYU in 1966, subsequently studying at the Art Students League in New York City, and l'Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris. Bruns began exhibiting her work in 1975 at OK Harris Gallery, where she presented wall pieces crafted from found materials, cloth, and thin layers of colored plaster.

In 1980, she was a guest artist at the Caraccio Etching Studio, and her prints were later published by Orion Editions. In 2002, she received a printmaking fellowship from the Women's Studio Workshop. Between 2000 and 2006, she participated in four two-person exhibitions at the Tew Gallery in Atlanta, Georgia, while continuing to exhibit in group shows and engage in community and curatorial projects. Notable efforts include organizing Dumbo Open Studios, curating *Persona: A New Look at Portraits* (1997) and *Festival of Political Pleasure* (2017), publishing artists' books (*Pages*, with Robert Jacks), and creating stage décor for the Bellerophon Dance Company.

Bruns was featured in a 2013 interview by *Gorky's Granddaughter.*

Her recent exhibitions include The Parlour Bushwick (2015), Sculpture Space in Long Island City, SRO Gallery in Brooklyn (2017–18), and Zurcher Gallery (2021 and 2023). She also held a solo exhibition at White Columns in 2023. In 2024, she published *A View*, a 100-page book of drawings and photographs.

Bruns has received numerous grants and residencies, including the recent: 2025: Monson Residency, Monson, Maine 2024: MyMA Grant and VCCA Residency, Amherst, Virginia 2023: Saltonstall Residency, Ithaca, New York 2019: Tree of Life Grant 2018: Artists' Fellowship Grant

STATEMENT

Personifying public life in my figurative art is a way of processing the chaotic, violent world of crisis we live in, taking its forms from global art history. I attempt a paradox: through nuanced beauty, to see the truly ugly. Its hand-made forms incorporate the language of head, bust, full figure with the invention of paper laminates, malleable sheets of newspaper layered with rice paste followed by a finishing plaster. The sculptures juxtapose opposites---organic forms with the geometric, joined by a single neutral color. Discarding the armature in Western sculptural tradition, I work spontaneously to sumbolize the political freedom to act.

NARRATIVE

My sculpture begins with the human figure, not for the sake of description, but to present an actor whose memory, ethics, emotion, and imagination visually and aesthetically reveal themselves. I began by graduating NYU in Fine Arts, Washington Square 1962-66. There, I took class with professor Robert Kaupelis who was known for his dynamic teaching in creative approaches to figure drawing, incorporating Kimon Nicolaides' long influential *The Natural Way to Draw.* It featured something new in the long history of gesture, the sense and concept of the body's total movement. I studied with Milton Resnick, and my education

included a pivotal 1968 studio visit from Eva Hesse, both of whom fundamentally expanded my understanding of improvisational processes. After, I went to the Art Students League for a year in painting and drawing.

In the 1980s while living and working in Soho my work participated in the current ideas of deconstructing the stretched canvas, questioning the picture as a window. Quickly thereafter in galleries and discussion was a long succession of postmodern styles such as pop, op, conceptual, body art, minimalism, happenings, and the pictures generation. The energy of this moment led in my case to a cul-de-sac. Postmodernism wasn't me, and inspiring figurative painters Alice Neel, Elaine de Kooning, and Frida Kahlo and others were invisible. Thus, I came to roam elsewhere for a space to develop my vision and turned to sculpture, working in small wax models cast in bronze. When I realized that they were taken for accessorizing figurines instead of models for enlargement, I was prompted to work in full scale.

For this transition, I needed an entirely new construction concept and materials because the softness of wax was unsuitable. Through experimentation, guided by the need to discard the traditional armature which precludes improvisation, I invented the unique materials of custom paper laminates and a specialized formula for finishing plaster. This breakthrough freed my process. It allowed me to build full-sized figures from the ground up with light, hollow, tactile materials to enact the meaning of spontaneity and improvisation: its reciprocity of self and materials versus coercion and control.

In 1994, I moved my studio to the warehouse-loft district of Dumbo, Brooklyn, an environment that also directly transformed my process and community. The abandoned manufacturing zone produced on its streets an abundance of discarded Styrofoam packing materials. Their unique geometric shapes and industrial oddities—holes, stamped letters, and numbers—formed a light-weight, symbolic contrast to the wrinkly, organic paper laminates. These are my basic materials today. In Dumbo I actively engaged with the local creative ecosystem and co-organized the 68 Jay Street Open Studios in 1997. Around 1999 I exhibited with the Brooklyn Waterfront Artists Coalition (BWAC) and AIR Gallery where we collaborated as independent artists to take the exhibition and distribution of our work into our own hands.

My art-making is an integrative process, intuitively gathering diverse, meaningful yet surprising components into a whole, as does the dream. This conception of sculpture is a dramatic turn from the era of Rodin 1840-1917 and from the American modernists working in fabricated steel in recent times. Rodin declared that sculpture is very prosaic, not a matter of inspiration or emotion, with the only principle to copy what you see. Yet, he maintained, he saw with eyes grafted on the heart. American Modernists up to the present time embraced abstraction, the so-called truth to materials, and the utilization of industrial manufacturing processes, its philosophy believing that abstract shapes could communicate psychological and emotional truths, or that they didn't matter.

In contrast, my view of sculpture developed in another direction, evolving from my experiences and temperament, toward a lineage spearheaded by Giacometti 1901-1966, despite all the subsequent decades dedicated to pure abstraction. I believed I could improve on the tendency for sculpture to look mechanical and formal and worked from no theory but from the

inspiration of other art, especially taking cues from wartime German painters such as Otto Dix and Max Beckmann, who were surrounded by the most intense social conditions, and the Ab Ex value of spontaneity in art-making. I looked at art from pre-history, outsiders, the archaic, and the indigenous choosing figure forms of mask, totem, head, bust, and full figure. I sought a similar feeling found in some African sculpture, one which felt natural, unforced, un-polemical, alive, open, and at the same time meaningful in a deep way that's never illustrational or obvious. I discovered that by being in the moment intensely and openly, the creative force lets something new, heretofore unseen and unexpected appear.

My 1960s formative era celebrated the speaking, writing, and theory of transplanted philosopher Herbert Marcuse of the Frankfurt School and its Critical Theory. My art's larger intellectual landscape is set within the contested Enlightenment "man" who possessed agency, will, and consciousness, rejected by the philosophies of structuralism and poststructuralism after WWII due to the massive twentieth century atrocities committed modern cultures. My view sets aside the common ridicule of the human as beyond redemption, and asserts that "man" is still there. The sculptures themselves operate on a continuum between abstraction and bodily legibility, individually conceived rather than built as a series, resisting the commercial impulse toward amplified production. Most of them require lengthy revisions before coming to rest in an aesthetic ideal that conjoins the refined and raw.