

Mary Frank

Mary Frank reveals herself once more to be the visual poet of the inner life, evoking the pain and the mystery of our human embeddedness in the natural world. She is not afraid of the large subjects, nor is she reluctant to deploy her extraordinary skills as a creator of memorable imagery in the service of our darkest memories: death, chaos, loss, fragmentation. Nor does she trivialize tragedy and terror by suggesting some easy redemptive value to be obtained from their contemplation. Rather, the artist confronts this darkness of the spirit and wrestles it into vivid pictorial expression.

— LINDA NOCHLIN, 1998

Over the course of her career, Mary Frank has worked with sculpture, painting, drawing, printmaking, and recently encaustic, suggesting that her primary loyalty is not to a particular way of working or to any medium, but rather to the power of direct expression and to the act of creation itself. As has previously been the case with her sculpture, this new body of work shows her eagerness to use the intuitions and improvisations that arise naturally during the creative process.

Mary Frank was born in London, England, in 1933 and moved to the United States at the age of seven. In the early 1950s she began carving wood sculpture, and briefly studied with Hans Hoffman and Max Beckmann. In 1969, she worked on large multi-part, figurative clay sculptures, drawings and mono-prints, which remained the major focus of her work throughout the 1970s and '80s. In the 1990s, she turned to painting as her primary medium.

The artist's paintings often begin as abstractions of dark and light, of swirling and still elements. Gradually they focus on a specific person, event, or place, slowly evolving as the artist creates, in her words, "a pre-existing time and atmosphere where events can take place." The recurring imagery of trees, owls, ships, chasms in the earth, and human figures running, leaping, crouching, and gazing at the whirlwind surrounding them becomes, in Mary's hands, an alphabet that is combined in ever-changing ways to communicate a language of grief and love, sorrow and ecstasy, mourning and exultation. Consequently, there is a narrative within each piece and also within the entire body of work as the imagery reverberates and

creates a cumulative effect.

Mary Frank has been the subject of numerous solo museum and gallery exhibitions, including a retrospective exhibition of sculpture, prints, and drawings organized by the Neuberger Museum in Purchase, New York in 1978; an in-depth look at her *Persephone Series* at the Brooklyn Museum in 1988; and *Natural Histories*, organized by the DeCordova Museum in 1988, which traveled to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the Everson Museum of Art in 1989. In 2000, the Neuberger presented *Encounters*, a major traveling retrospective of the artist's paintings, which was accompanied by a book by Linda Nochlin. In 2003, *Experiences*, a solo exhibition of Mary Frank's paintings was organized by the Marsh Art Gallery, University of Richmond. The exhibition was curated by Martica Sawin, who also wrote the catalogue essay.

Hayden Herrera is the author of *Mary Frank*, a major survey of Mary Frank's work that was published in 1990 by Abrams, New York. *Shadows of Africa*, a collaboration between the artist and poet Peter Matthiessen, was published by Abrams in 1992.

Her work is in the permanent collections of the above institutions and other museums including: the Art Institute of Chicago, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the Jewish Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Museum of Modern Art, the National Museum of American Art, the Newark Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and Yale University Art Gallery.