

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: 2025: Monson Residency 2024: MyMA Grant and VCCA Residency, Amherst, Virginia 2023: Saltonstall Residency, Ithaca, New York 2019: Tree of Life Grant 2018: Artists' Fellowship Grant

STATEMENT

Concept

The body in my art represents the human subject, both an inner and a public self. Grounded in a sculpted body, it counters the cultural tendency to detach from physical reality or view the body as a machine, while also featuring a resistance to oppression and striving for freedom, utopian thoughts that have lit Western culture for its entire history. Its symbolic significance echoes many indigenous cultures going back to the earliest times of art and affirms their relevance to a life/nature balance so significant to the current era, cultures who also treated women with respect within their communal society.

My work adopts a range of historical conventions--- full figures, heads, masks, and bust from the ancient world, folk art, to modern times, fusing them with such themes and levels as the political, mythic/spiritual forces, and the psyche. Implicit is a rejection of linear histories with their ideological, colonial biases. It freely experiments with forms and materials aligning with the Moderns, and also has a strong connection to the Situationists 1957-1972. Some contemporary inspirations are Thomas Hirschorn, Leon Golub, Ana Mendieta, Beverly Buchanan, Phillip Guston, Louise Bourgeois, Jacqueline deJong (herself a Situationist), Kader Attia, Alice Neel, James Kerry Marshall---artists who embody highly individuated, aesthetically original visions of contemporary life.

Drawing

In drawing I begin by selecting a decisive moment from streaming dance videos, where the performers inspire me by enacting their own freedom by means of movement. After describing this stilled moment, I continue to improvise with formal inventions, merging with other specific contents such as political ideas, jokes, suffering, the irrational, experiential, ambiguous, emotional and theatrical. The drawn body engages in a voyage of imagination, spiritual and psychological discovery, uncovering some of its potentials for freedom in thought and feeling.

Background

I committed myself to a life in art in my early twenties coming of age in the 1960s, a time of profound social transformation, thundering with movements for emancipation and justice from the previous McCarthy era's repression. I marched for civil rights in Selma, Alabama and participated against the genocide in Vietnam. Today, my sculpture features the *dissenting body*, which adds to the discourse by joining the corporeal and political, where codes of oppression and power can be symbolically revealed, anchored to concrete, visual reality. As culture we are regressing instead of progressing, moving from crisis to catastrophe. I look at pre-history, outsiders, the archaic, the indigenous for aesthetic and cultural values for how to live in balance with what remains of nature.

Vision

One tactic of the dissenting body's vision in sculpture is visual pleasure, evoking mythic Eros by means of using a neutral palette that brings out subtleties of shape, line, volume, and texture. Aesthetics can move a viewer beyond everyday life into another realm, a temporary end in itself, suspended from practical worlds. Back to planet earth, its subjects and topics, the viewer potentially returns with new thoughts and feeling from such excursions.

Another means of its visual engagement is the interplay of the opposing qualities of industrially shaped styrofoam packing elements vs. *paper laminates*, an organic-looking material I developed to create hollow, lightweight, wrinkly forms by layering newspaper with rice paste. I evolved a brush-on *finishing plaster* to complete it with a firm shell yet tactile softness.

The use of such diametric qualities challenges the either-or thinking typical of power such as body vs. mind, to reclaim values such as the holistic, inclusive, intuitive, and poetic.

Further, my sculptural process enacts freedom by means of improvisation that requires being fully alive in the moment, dwelling with the unknown. Then, unexpected forms emerge from the reciprocity of self and materials, from this collaboration rather than through dominance and control.

The last means of its political resistance, besides creativity itself, is to overtly personify an entity or force, such as the wall-mounted bust form, *Corporate State*.

The following describes some recent sculptures and their range more specifically:

01. Don't Shoot---a terrified figure is rooted to the ground in surrender and despair in the face of gun violence. Its paper-like surface underlines vulnerability, a rigid geometry contrasting with raw, organic limbs. It's both totemic like ancient sculpture and modern in its form of anxiety.
02. Ruins of War ---a full figure standing sentinel-like, subjected to violent injury. Its surfaces and shapes hold a turmoil of geometry, the soft and smooth, jagged, and crumpled.
03. Surveillance State---a squarish form, spiked with aggressive eyes and a gaping mouth, capturing the pervasive anxiety of being watched in an era of expanding government surveillance.
04. Techno Man II----a bust form in which human eyes peer out from a mechanical fortress, a figure who has become robotic, absorbing into itself the environment's machinery.
05. Wow---uses the ancient form of mask to register astonishment, rooting it in elemental awe and strangeness, yet modern in its smooth whiteness.
06. Meltdown ----a wall mounted mask, surprised by an inner psychic explosion, simultaneously suggesting an ancient archetypal artifact.
07. Death Shrine---is a free standing reference to the unconscious forces behind violent behaviors and policies, merging a folk form with modern propaganda advocating wars.
08. Mask of Winter---a wall mounted mask using machined and organic forms, becoming one in winter, a frozen landscape of cold, short days.
09. Celebration---a totemic, ancient-seeming columnar form made solely from thick walls of paper laminates and finishing plaster, reaching upwards in its joy.
10. Bear Sandwich--- wall-mounted, merging humor and absurdity by combining the shape of a slice of white bread with a bear's snout, its rolling eyes on alert.
11. Fringe Elements---a group of masks, each highly individuated, mounted on a standard, representing the social Other---outsiders, the excluded, scapegoats who serves as objects of aggression. The sculptures invite the viewer to draw near and inhabit their space with empathy.