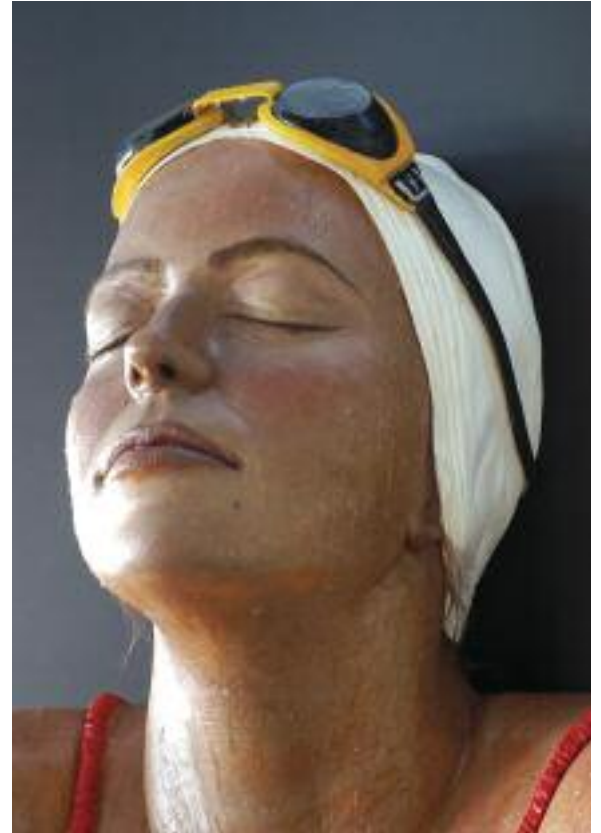


BREAKING THE SURFACE

Carole Feuerman's elemental art celebrates both the body and the earth—and the relationship between them.



by Sara Evans

Carole Feuerman is an artist who embodies many paradoxes. Small in stature, huge in talent, calm and energetic, ambitious, yet noncommercial, strong and feminine, grounded and spiritual - one realizes quickly that this is a woman of infinite qualities and an artist to be reckoned with. Her art is edgy, intense, erotic, and beautiful, work that elicits a torrent of adjectives.

As a sculptor, Feuerman is clearly not a household word. Yet, she has a long and impressive resumé, has work in major museums and private collections around the world, and is clearly on a fast and unstoppable trajectory with her art. Her work is owned by the Albright, the Metropolitan, the



Hermitage, the Gorbachov Collection in Moscow, the Brandies University Museum, and in regional museums and collections around the world. Private collectors of her work include the Clintons, the Kissingers, Mr. and Mrs. David Finn, the Malcom Forbes Collection, and many others across the globe. In fact, when the late Malcom Forbes saw an exhibit of Carole Feuerman's erotic work, he bought it - all fifteen pieces, for his collection. Since 1994, she has had numerous solo shows across the United States and in many other countries, garnering many medals and prizes, including the prestigious Betty Parsons Sculpture award and the Medici Award from the City of Florence. She has been the subject of countless articles and essays, books and monographs in a veritable Babel of languages. She also participates in numerous professional organizations. But for Feuerman, these are all just byproducts of her art; it is all about her work. As a true artist, creating is as key to her being as breathing. All this whirlwind activity might indicate someone who spins like a top - again, here's a paradox: Carole Feuerman is strong, sane, and centered, someone who knows how to pace herself, and who clearly does a fine job of balancing home and studio, family and professional life.

"So how come," one may well ask, "I haven't heard of her?" Sculpture is a difficult and under-sung medium. "It's big - and hard to store," the artist herself notes. Sculptors often receive short shrift as artists. Although we may recognize specific works, it is rare to be able to put a name to them. Certain artists, because of the trendiness or sheer monumentality of their works, such as the Jeff Koons, Richard Serras



and Louise Bourgeois of the world have a high level of recognition. But compared to painters, the work of many sculptors lacks the acclaim and attention it well deserves.

Feuerman is a New Yorker born and bred. As a child and young woman, she was strongly discouraged from becoming an artist. But talent will out. After studying at Hofstra, Temple University, and the School of Visual Arts in New York City, Feuerman began her career as an illustrator. A true child of the sixties, she created many album covers for such artists as the Rolling Stones and Alice Cooper. She notes, "All of my life, making art has been my passion. As I have experienced life and art, the forms that my work takes have evolved and deepened." She began experimenting with three-dimensional work, a precursor to her life as a sculptor, in the 1970's, creating covers for National Lampoon.

In 1974, she set out on the challenging journey of transiting between art that someone else wanted



her to make to creating art that was uniquely her own. In finding her artistic voice, one often heavily accented with eroticism and sexuality, she did not always escape controversy. But recognition was building fast for her work, and in 1981, Feuerman was one of only three artists selected by a jury to participate in an exhibit at the Heckscher Museum on Long Island, to exhibit at Fordham University in New York City, and to participate in the Guggenheim Museum's Learning Through Art Program along with such renowned artists as Romare Beardon, Christo, Paloma Picasso, Keith Haring, and Robert Rauschenberg.

Carole Feuerman was on her way - and has never looked back. She began to create oil painted resin sculptures "so lifelike you could feel their presence in a room." She would meticulously model in plaster, using life models, paying incredible attention to the most finite details. Her work, described as "hyper-real" or "super-real," has inevitably been compared with the work of the late pop artist, Duane Hanson. But while Hanson's work has an often ruthless quality that borders on the grotesque, Feuerman's is surpassingly beautiful. And while his works portray human figures in their entirety, hers are fragmented. Many portray women rising out of the water, or rising from a bath or shower. These women are strong and beautiful, wrapped-up in and absorbed in their feelings of strength and emergence. "Catalina" is perhaps Carol Feuerman's most emblematic piece. A woman in a bathing cap, with goggles on her head, rises from a swim. Cut off as she is, at mid-breast and upper arms, she has a look of universal pleasure - head back, eyes closed, strong and beautiful. The work says everything about the body, about water, and about air. Enclosed within herself, she is experiencing universal pleasure.



For Feuerman, water is the key element, not only of her art, but also of her world. The body, she notes, is comprised primarily of water, and water is the element that covers most of the earth, bringing it not only vital sustenance, but, also, endless pleasure.

Feuerman refers to a group of her works as "the water drop series," sculptures of swimmers with actual, transparent drops of acrylic "water" on their skin, so realistic that one must stifle the urge to touch them, to check out if they are indeed real. In an exhibition called, "By the Sea," Carole Feuerman's swimmers all exude a sense of self, of health and well-being. Each is a mature, fully realized woman, some smiling and reaching up. Locked in pleasure, they revel within their inner worlds of physicality - each with her eyes closed, as if to contain and prolong the magic moment of emergence. Deep within the hyper-realism of these pieces is a classical timelessness, a sense of the eternal woman.

In 1986, Carole Feuerman began to explore the intricacies of human relationships in her work in fifteen sculptures that she called her "Relationship Series." Unlike her earlier works, these were unpainted and had abstract elements. Like the earlier works, they portrayed fragments of the human body. She notes, "Instead of capturing a moment in time, I was delving into timeless moment and universal emotions." As an artist, Feuerman realized she had to change and grow, to create art that was evolving and never static. To that end, in 1990, she began casting her work in bronze. Her bronzes are, quite simply, stunning. Rough cast, hand-finished, abstracted fragments - they have the feel of the eternal about them and clearly place Feuerman within the mainstream of great, historical sculpture.

In his essay, "States of Ecstasy," art critic John Yau observes, "From an art-historical perspective, Feuerman is one of a small number of postwar sculptors who successfully shunned Minimalism in

favor of the human figure. These sculptors faced a daunting challenge, which was how to make a freestanding sculpture of the human figure that didn't appear nostalgic, and that didn't look back to the heroic work of Rodin... (Feuerman's) subjects are caught in a moment of transition that radiates an intense eroticism... her figures seem capable of thought. They evoke an inward life which signals the distance between them and us... directing our attention to a moment that is both familiar and highly charged." We somehow know what these figures are feeling, and yet cannot quite entirely fathom it. This is the essential quality, the simultaneous knowing and not knowing that keeps on drawing us to her work. ♦

Carole Feuerman is represented by Present Global Art, 5301 South Dixie Highway, West Palm Beach, Florida

