

Jann Rosen-Queralt

Jennifer M. Dyer

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Jann Rosen-Queralt's works tell of an organic earth of which we are an integral part. These pieces generate a lushness that rivals the natural world that we overlook and injure every day.

Concerned with the condition and functioning of the world, Rosen-Queralt challenges the viewer to an interior exploration. In her work, she deals with the holistic, the unifying life-energy pervading all matter. By reducing a complex subject to a concise language of forms that is at once literal and symbolic, she provokes a personal understanding of and relationship to her work.

The unity and driving force of Rosen-Queralt's works, from the highly emotionally charged "Erratics" to the narrative "Spirit Storehouse," can only be experienced; their powerful effect is difficult to verbalize. They convey the essence of a primeval natural environment that makes me question the surreal colors of a suburban Baltimore spring. The reeds and furs, fabricated from synthetic fibers and human hair, are a creation unto themselves. The experience is a return to an original state of, and an awareness of, communion with nature.

"Dovetail" (1989) resembles a Chinese calligraphic character. Rosen-Queralt explains that the piece refers to geomancy, divination by means of lines and figures formed by throwing earth on a surface. In acupuncture, "dovetail" is the area of the lungs associated with free breathing. Acupuncture is based on the idea that "chi," life-force, flows through everything animate and inanimate.

The elements of "Dovetail" are literal. The top piece of slate and wood is shaped like lungs and a bronchial tube, while the second piece of wood resembles a diaphragm. The kodalith, a backlit transparency, contains two repeated photos of the Chinese celebrations of the coming of the spring wind. It acts as a bridge, a central part of the communion between nature and man. At the bottom, a piece of wood with five dangling tails made from wigs and fibers is a pun on the name "Dovetail," as well as a visually rich element. Grounding and drawing energy into the entire work, the tails reflect our dependence on the natural world.

The pristine yet organic lines and materials of "Dovetail" are an intellectual exercise as compared with Rosen-Queralt's "Erratics," which are more introspective and

immediate. Rather than depicting the manifestations of an emotion or state of being, Rosen-Queralt shows us the emotion itself. Rather than a narrative, in which the viewer must create the links among elements, these works *are* the emotional, figurative, and psychological links.

In “Erratic IV,” for example, a steel rod and frayed cord resemble the hands of a clock. A heavy slate resting on the pole appears to have arrested its motion, and the cord is “grounded” by a small black box. Still and forlorn, it suggests peacefulness, isolation, the arresting of time, the exhaustion after the constant struggle of life. Positive and negative emotions emanate from these pieces, which were, in fact, a response to Rosen-Queralt’s father’s death after a six-year bout with a terminal illness.

Where other works encourage the viewer to stand back and observe, “Joining the Valleys” beckons one to come closer. We find an offering on the landing between two sets of stairs that sprout grasses. This shrine invites one to kneel before its five bowls containing plastic cowboys and Indians, keys, pennies and nickels, toy cars, and blocks. These are our gifts to the world – plastic, war, pollution, the illusory and unjust hierarchy created by money, and finally, destruction. The unspoken message: nature gives us everything we need and these are the devotional offerings that we give in return.

Rosen-Queralt shows us that we are inextricably part of nature. Her work bears an intensity and immediacy concealing profound depths. Deceptively simple and literal, her works are a beautiful metaphor for the natural world we live in and the interior worlds that guide us.