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## Martha Walker: Drawing with Metal

SUNDAY, 30 MAY 2010 00:00

WRITTEN BY A. SEBASTIAN FORTINO

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Martha Walker

Martha Walker is a sculptor based in Brooklyn, NY, but like many residents of Gotham she has a connection to South Florida. The artist went to Miami Beach High School, and graduated from there in 1971.

"In those days," said Walker from her home in Park Slope, Brooklyn, "Miami was a decrepit old folks home. In those days, we couldn't wait to get out. It's amazing that it has become such a hot spot in the past 20 years."

When asked if she took art classes in high school, Walker surprisingly responded no. While interested in art she did not take any classes in the field until her senior year. Her art teacher was immediately impressed with her work. One day he told her she had to go to an interview with recruiters from the Pratt Institute in New York.

"I actually worked through high school, and I didn't think I could afford art school. Resentfully," she added with a laugh given how art has become her career, "I went to this Pratt interview. I was resentful because I had to spend \$20, in those days, to have them review my portfolio and transcripts."

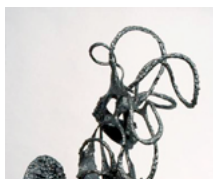
The recruiters, however, were very impressed. Pratt awarded her a partial scholarship. Once in New York, as a freshman, she felt intimidated by other young artists who had more of a structured background than she did, artistically. The museums in New York intrigued her, especially the sculptures. Walker claimed sculpture as her major the next year.

"There are a number of ways to create sculpture," said Walker. "Carving, modeling, casting from a wax model, and direct metal, in which you weld sheets, or pipes together."

She was immediately intrigued by this final approach to sculpture as it allowed her to "draw with metal."

She has a further connection to South Florida, other than her love of Key West, and high school. The Boca Resort recently installed two of her metal sculptures in a new wing of the hotel. "Birth," is a 7 foot tall piece in the lobby, as in many of her pieces there is an aquatic, microbiological feel to the pebbled steel. Walker is able to make the solidity of metal seem to take on a fluidity of an amoeba or a jellyfish.

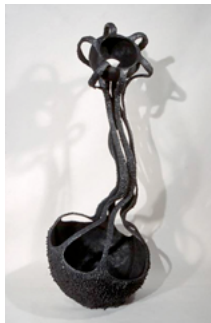
She is quite in demand. When the resort asked for another piece, she had to decline, as it was already housed in a museum. However, she promised them a similar piece. "Venus," is reminiscent of the center of a flower. The technical ability of her blowtorch renders the steel basket-like, with an air of whimsy to it that recalls a Tim Burton creation.



Her work has also been featured on Gossip Girl. This was after someone involved with the show's creative team saw some of her work on a website.

"What was really interesting, to me, is that one of the characters on the show visited the gallery and took pictures of my sculpture on the show," she added fondly.

In addition to the Boca Resort, and having her work on national television, she is also



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represented by the Elaine Baker Gallery of Boca, which discovered Walker's work there via an annex they have at the resort.

"Elaine Baker tracked me down and has since shipped down 'T'kiyyah," that is the sound the Shofar makes," Walker added. "While I am not religious, I am culturally Jewish and love the feminine look of the shofar."

The shofar is a horn, traditionally made of a ram's horn. It has a serpentine curviness to it. However, Walker captures the shape of the sound, not the horn itself. There is something reminiscent of an ear in this piece, as if it is not only the sound, but the heard sound.

"Sculpture, said Walker, "as most artistic fields is dominated by men. Part of it is the physicality, women can be intimidated by sculpture, when it comes to the use of tools that have been traditionally associated with men. Yet, I think carpentry is very similar to sewing, because it's a lot of measuring, sewing, and cutting. Art is sort of where and what you allow yourself in terms of what you can or cannot do."

This is true of Walker's life, as well. In the 1980s she and her partner were the first gay couple to be married at their synagogue in Brooklyn, and in 1985 they were one of the first couples to conceive using artificial insemination. She now has two children, a 25- year-old son, a graduate of the Columbia School of Journalism and a daughter who at 16 leads up her school's gay straight alliance. Her children, she says, are both straight but they feel that "our community is their community."

Of her rarified spirit, and commitment to her craft, despite sculpture being a male dominated field: "I once spoke to a class of kids about bigotry. Sometimes you have no idea when you are being discriminated against. No one will call you a dyke or a faggot," she said, "but they might feel it. So, for that reason I find that it's best not to focus on it. If you focus on what people say you can't do, it can push you back. Some times you need blinders to do what you want to accomplish."



## Comments

#1 **art finkle** 2010-06-02 22:27

For more information about Shofar and other Holy Temple instruments, we have written extensively on the Shofar and have three websites

1) Joint Effort with Michael Chusid, an expert Shofar sounder and commentator

<http://www.hearingshofar.com>

2) Shofar Sounders WebPage

<http://shofar221.com>

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