

There is a lot of superb art being made these days; this column shines light on a trio of gifted individuals.

TANYA RAGIR (b. 1955) creates sculptures that encompass both her love of pure form and the profoundly personal themes she seeks to evoke. The latter include feminist explorations of self, love, vulnerability, trust, and overcoming one's limitations, be they cultural, political, sexual, or even self-imposed. Ragir achieves all of this by working collaboratively with a model, then sculpting in water clay, which is fired or cast in bronze, aluminum, stainless steel, or polyester resin. The resulting pieces come in a range of sizes, though she is best known for her life-size figures and geometric compositions.

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Ragir was drawing and sculpting early on, so perhaps it is not surprising that, by 15, she was studying human anatomy and sketching cadavers at the University of Southern California's medical center. In her teens, she also taught herself the "lost wax" casting process by making jewelry, even as she excelled at various dance forms, including ballet, modern, and jazz. Ragir graduated from the University of California at Santa Cruz with a B.A. in both sculpture and dance, and now says that "being both a dancer and a woman informs everything I do as a sculptor."

Logically, she has won the most acclaim for figures of women in motion, conveying both their grace and gravitas. "When I sculpt someone," Ragir explains, "my goal is to expose the way in which I perceive the beauty in that woman. You could say I fall in love with the person I am sculpting. It becomes a truly intimate relationship." The female figures are either free-standing or wall-mounted, and the one illustrated here (*Leap of Faith*) is part of her recent *Warrior* series; she initiated it last year after losing her father, a wrenching experience that has reminded her of her own mortality.

Ragir also celebrates the female body through more abstracted modes such as grids, totems, and pedestals. Here she focuses on details of the figure, seeing them as if through a lens, then changing the scale and arrangement so that we see them anew. Powerfully inspired by the way that Georgia O'Keeffe and (the photographer) Edward Weston once explored the interiors of form, Ragir essentially deconstructs the body to evoke the sensual relationship between landforms and human forms.

Ragir's work can be seen in person at four California venues: Decker Studios (North Hollywood), DeVorzon Gallery (Beverly Hills), Glass Garage Fine Art Gallery (Los Angeles), and Gloria Delson Contemporary Arts (Los Angeles).



Tanya Ragir (b. 1955), *Leap of Faith* [edition of 11], 2015, bronze, 44 x 24 x 20 in., Gloria Delson Contemporary Arts, Los Angeles