Dina Wind and Her Sculpture

By Tom Moran | excerpt from *MONUMENTAL: Enlarging Dina Wind's Harp of David #1*

Origins

Once Julio Gonzalez (1876-1942, Spanish) and Pablo Picasso (1881-1973, Spanish) had begun their collaborative explorations in welded iron in the early 20th Century from 1928 to 1932, the modern age of welded metal sculpture, propelled by a structural aesthetic, began to expand the domain of sculpture into limitless new dimensions.

Mass, or the materiality of sculpture on a small or large scale, once the essential locus of the medium through Rodin, had been fundamentally changed. A sculptor now had the means to draw and thereby suspend lines of metal in space. This fundamental principle continues to be explored by sculptors to the present day. Coupled with advancements in the material sciences since World War II, the U.S. space program, and the ever-evolving alloys and manufacturing processes, there are dramatic new ways to create metal sculpture especially in a large scale.

In consideration of the work of Dina Wind, (1938-2014, Israeli-American) there is the obvious subject of her attraction to the dangerous process of welding steel for the fabrication of her sculptures. At one time, welding was considered as an unlikely medium for a woman artist to engage in. Even Picasso considered welding a risk when he first took up the medium fearing the loss of use of his hands. **(1)** His respect for the dangers of heat and fire allowed him to work without incident and produce many notable welded steel works including constructions such as *Figure*, 1928. **(A)**

Today's technologically-minded society sometimes loses sight of its industrial roots. We must remember that women played an integral role in the American war effort throughout World War II. Thousands of women welders, working side-by-side with their male counterparts, toiled over long, often dangerous and heavy projects fabricating the thousands of tanks and Liberty Ships required to eventually defeat the Axis powers. Time has erased some of the memory of these important contributions in helping to save the free world.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s sculptors such as Louise Nevelson (1899-1988, American) **(B)** and Beverly Pepper **(C)** (b. 1922, American) were making or overseeing the fabrication of some of their first large sculptures in steel. Their work, and the work of their peers helped to catalyze a new era of women sculptors working in a domain of sculpture which had previously been reserved for men. **(2)**

Destiny

Having earned her B.A. in 1961 at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel prior to her arrival in the United States, Dina Wind spent her formative years studying art in Philadelphia. She earned a Certificate of Art Appreciation in 1972 from the Barnes Foundation at its Merion, PA campus, and an M.A. from the University of Pennsylvania**. (3)**

Wind's most defining influence was Abstract Expressionism, the movement still prevalent in many of the dialogues in the art world during her formative years of study but waning in power to new generations of art movements such as Pop, Minimalism, and Conceptual art. Also important to Wind was her exposure to the ideas of Hans Hoffman while she was studying with Sam Feinstein an artist/teacher, who had been a student of the legendary artist. **(4)**

Eager to explore new mediums, Wind's experience in the welding classes at the Cheltenham Arts Center in suburban Philadelphia in the late 1970s, studying under the sculptor Leon Sitarchik, was the transformative experience that

inspired her to change direction. By this time, she had been painting for over a decade but decided to immerse herself in the process of welding sculpture. She began to visit junk yards and combined the disparate pieces of car, machine parts, and tools into actively spatial compositions possessing dynamism and visual provocation in a variety of scales**. (5) (6)**

Emboldened by her seemingly natural skill at welding, Wind committed her endless curiosity to the exploration of sculpture in both freestanding and wall mounted orientations. At times, she allowed the scale of her work to be dictated by the idiosyncrasy of the scrap steel she used. "The heavy metals I use seem decisively light and airy due to the movement of the composition. The identity of the original found objects gives way to new assemblage, while simultaneously encouraging the observer to discover the original, familiar parts within the composition." **(7)** Items both harmless and dangerous, such as saw blades and acutely pointed angles burst into the viewers space perhaps causing a bit of fear initially. But more importantly, these elements trigger the imagination of the viewer and by the directness of Wind's intent, the familiar and unfamiliar unapologetic forms compete for the viewer's comprehension. **(D)** In other instances, she reached into other scales with pieces of metal detritus composed in a welded orbit abound other scrap metal elements securely bound to the earth**. (E)**

Steadily building on her experience over time, she produced a large and coherent body of work. In her work, it's clear that she had absorbed Hoffman's doctrine that composition is poignant and must rule the viewer with power and balance and maximum presence. Her approach was a courageous pursuit to explore sculpture alone, a manner of working that had been heroicized by Abstract Expressionists but in this case with Wind the heroine. Over the decades of work to follow, she exuded as much determination, confidence, purpose, and vision, and worked as hard on her sculpture as Rosie the Riveter had on World War II fighter planes.

Influences

The body of work Wind completed between the early 1980s and 1996 empowered her rise in the ranks as a sculptor in Philadelphia and elsewhere. She formed a longtime affiliation with the Nexus Gallery in Philadelphia and the Veridian Gallery in New York City. She exhibited in these galleries periodically throughout the rest of her career. Wind's embrace of the welded steel medium had long been an area dominated by a sizeable cadre of male sculptors over the decades since Julio Gonzalez and Pablo Picasso. She was especially interested in the transformative linear steel works of David Smith (1906-1965, American) from the mid-20th century.

Smith was influenced by photographs of Picasso's 1928 *Project for Sculpture* article in a 1929 issue of *Cahiers d'art*. Soon to be the next seminal figure of the medium, Smith had refined his skills as a welder of armored tanks and locomotives during World War II. The power of his steel sculptures resonated across the art world from the 1930s through the 1970s, particularly in his use of landscape and totemic, as well as iconic, geometric steel forms. **(F)** Smith assimilated Gonzalez's and Picasso's notion of being able to *draw in space* with welded steel, a concept of freeing forms from the bounds of gravity. Smith's use of scrap steel and iron, another joy of Picasso's, allowed him to accomplish some of the most resonant sculptures of his career **(G)** and influenced some of the most towering and influential figures of the post-World War II era to follow, including Richard Stankiewicz, Mark di Suvero, Louise Nevelson, Beverly Pepper, Edwardo Chilida, John Chamberlain, and Anthony Caro. **(8)**

The Work

Wind's body of work consists of specific series of multi-scaled freestanding sculptures, wall reliefs, installation projects, and works on paper. Each of these areas of her output represents a distinct vision and working method. She envisioned some of the works to be exhibited as wall sculptures or freestanding in orientation. Wind formed her linear-based compositions stating "I call my welded assemblage drawings in space. Terms such as composition, balance and movement are very important in understanding the three-dimensional work I create." **(9)**

Essentially by drawing with welded steel, Wind seduced the forms of her choice into compacted compositional "arenas" in various scales and orientations while always challenging the viewer to comprehend the resonation of the elements of each composition. She understood scale and established a coherent range of possibilities for her works which were fabricated in materials fully under her command. They are compact but powerful statements **(H)** sometimes serious, at other times whimsical, and often like the improvisation of a jazz solo**. (I)** In materiality, the work denies weakness and communicates an unforgivable strength. Her work expresses her deeply held joy in creating sculpture in a medium she felt completely free to explore.

One of Wind's strongest wall pieces, *Wheelbarrow*, 1991, Painted Steel **(J),** was acquired by the Hechinger Collection. **(10)** This work has an incredibly dramatic composition which confronts the viewer head on. It captures Wind's deep affection for the action painting of Abstract Expressionism through its key organization of dynamic angles which thrust through space from a solid compositional center. **(11)** The parts of an actual deconstructed wheelbarrow are there in the center of the composition along with two compact car mufflers with exhaust pipes twisting across the plane of view. All are dominated by a large and threatening lumberjack's cross-cut saw. A round metal disc, like a child's snow saucer, and a flat angular plane of steel anchor the wall. All these interloping elements form an energetic composition. The sculpture suggests the proud hunter's trophy catch on a wall. Painted in a seductive yellow-tinged brown metal primer, reminiscent of Anthony Caro's color palette, the work is an incredible example of Wind's command of the elements. Her strength as a sculptor is embodied in this piece.

Wind remained true to her focus on steel as the basis for her sculpture despite the dramatic change in mediums and approaches to art throughout the 1990s and 2000s. In her own way, she was open to change and occasionally veered from steel to create new works in mediums such as rubber and paper. She left a strong legacy of works in her studio and in numerous public and private collections over her three decades as a sculptor. Her work has been embraced by the Woodmere Art Museum **(K)** and Grounds For Sculpture, two museums which have commissioned monumental enlargements of Wind's freestanding steel works for their respective collections. Dina Wind's *Harp of David #1* **(L)** stands in steel at 26-feet tall at Grounds For Sculpture in a landscaped outdoor site alongside a river birch alee.

Harp of David #1

Dina Wind's *Harp of David #1*, 1985, steel, **(12)** was selected for enlargement at Grounds For Sculpture in a process that began in 2016. I made my first visit to Wind's studio and home in the summer of 2016 followed by a second visit to the home on an icy winter day in early 2017.

Speaking with Dina's husband Jerry and her son John about her work was essential since I had met Dina Wind only once, many years before she passed. **(13)** I was driven to find the essential sculpture in her vast body of work that would benefit from enlargement and installation in Grounds For Sculpture's lush outdoor landscape. By the time the search concluded, I had zeroed in on three freestanding steel works, two vertical and one horizontal. **(14)** The two vertical works had large circular themes. One had a large circle and a powerful line that soared to the work's highest

point. The other incorporated two large gear-like circles with unique and whimsical elements attached. The third was a horizontal landscape with outcroppings of steel fronds, that made a reference to my eyes of another Caro influence. I spent the next few weeks determining the locations of three separate yet distinctive outdoor sites for each work. I had set the criteria so that each site had to further the unique power and intentionality of the work and feel appropriate for the scale. All three works were quite different and additional landscaping needs for each potential location would be necessary. As it turned out, the three sites were very different from one another and were nowhere close to each other due to Grounds For Sculpture's varying features over its 42-acres. That summer, after a long and productive day of looking at each piece in the corresponding sites, Jerry and John Wind and key representatives of Grounds For Sculpture selected Dina Wind's *Harp of David #1* steel sculpture **(M)** for enlargement and installation on a one-acre site which is one of the sculpture parks most notable outdoor spaces situated alongside a stunning river-birch allee.

Looking back at Wind's output of sculptures in the 1980s finds key works leading to the culmination of the tour de force that is *Harp of David #1*. During this period, she welded several works which project a strong sense of monumentality. They include, *Goliath*, 1985; Steel, *See-Saw*, 1986, Steel; *Man #1*, 1983, Steel, and, *Spring and Triangle*, 1986, Steel. One of the key attributes of these works is that the compositions thrust vertically by Wind's incorporation of linear and stacked forms including springs, linear rods, balanced circles, and angular planes. Harp of David #1 achieves its verticality by her positioning of two large circular forms each containing elements such as curls, a bike sprocket, and perforated planar sheets of steel which are like fantasy magic carpets in steel. The energy of the piece and its circular lines give it the energy of the fast-moving baton of an orchestra conductor. In this case however, Wind is the conductor.

The Seward Johnson Atelier was contracted to fabricate the enlargement of *Harp of David #1*. Historically, the Atelier had been involved in the fabrication of many of the works in the collection of Grounds For Sculpture since the sculpture park opened to the public in 1993. Sculptors such as George Segal, Marisol Escobar, Isaac Witkin, Georgia O'Keefe, Michele Oka Doner, Ned Smyth, Charles Ray, and many others had taken advantage of having some of the most important works of their careers cast or fabricated at the Atelier. Under the direction of Atelier director Charles Haude and key fabrication experts such as Adam Garey, *Harp of David #1*, 1985 was enlarged and had to be constructed in sections due to its monumental size. The piece was moved to the site in the summer of 2018 and final fabrication and finishing took place in time for the dedication ceremony in August.

Harp of David #1 exudes much of Dina Wind's brilliant sense of composition, balance, and choice of elements and stands in exuberant presence standing at 26' in height. It possesses many of the important attributes she strove for in her sculptures and represents one of her finest efforts at drawing in space with steel.

Notes

1. *A Life of Picasso; The Cubist Rebel, 1907-1916*, John Richardson, n.p.
2. The period of the late 1960s to the early 1970s marked an important time in the rise of large public sculptures such as Picasso's *Untitled*, 1967, steel, in Chicago, Ill., Claus Oldenburg's *Clothespin*, 1976, steel, in Philadelphia, PA., and Louise Nevelson's first large-scale commission, *Atmosphere and Monument X*, 1969-70, at Princeton University, Princeton, NJ. Nevelson was also the first female sculptor to have her work commissioned as part of the resurgence in public art during this period.
3. Wind was a member of the Philadelphia Sculptors Group. She exhibited her work titled, *Red Trout Struggle Upstream*, 1996 in the 1998 exhibition *Philadelphia Sculptors, A Group Exhibition* at Grounds For Sculpture.
4. Hans Hoffman (1880—1956, German-American) was a renown German-American painter/teacher who was influential in his work and artistic philosophy. He is considered one of the most influential art teachers of the 20th century opening a school in

New York City and Provincetown, MA. He made significant and articulate talks and writings on painting, color and composition.

5. The lure of using scrap steel in sculpture is an established means of exploration and continues to be as valid today as it was in the mid-1920s when Picasso and Gonzalez were making their welded iron sculptures.
6. It was Robert Rauschenberg (1925 – 2008, American) who coined his use of scrap metal from junkyards in his sculptures and wall reliefs as the *Gluts* which he referred to as "souvenirs without nostalgia". *Robert Rauschenberg*, Consuelo Ciscar Casaban, p.10., exhibition catalogue, IVAM Institut Valencia d' Art Modern, Valencia 2005

7. An excerpt from Dina Wind's artist statement from the Sculptor Directory featured on the website of the International Sculpture Center.
8. Dina Wind respected the works of these sculptors and others including Eva Hesse and Nancy Graves.
9. An excerpt from Dina Wind's artist statement from the Sculptor Directory featured on the website of the International Sculpture Center.
10. The Hechinger Collection was donated to International Art and Artists, Washington, DC, 2003
11. Franz Kline (1910-1962, American) was a key figure of the movement and was known for his black and white action paintings which were dramatic and inspired by forms and structures in the world such as bridges. This example shows similar language as Wind used in *Wheelbarrow*.
12. Wind was inspired by the story of how King Saul found the sound of the harp most soothing and healing.
13. I recalled meeting Dina Wind at Nexus Gallery after a talk I gave while one of the exhibitions on view included her sculpture. Unfortunately, I had no further contact with her after that event. However, I remember how she had influenced two of my female sculptor friends and members of Nexus to take up welding.
14. During my viewings of Dina Wind's work, I observed several pieces which are candidates for monumental enlargement. They each give a sense of monumentality in the present scale.