



comes rambling down the incline, with animation and cheer, her hair flying around, with an exuberant smile that is pure warmth.

Inside Rhodes' home, I am greeted by an array of female energy; from the group of nursing, Labrador Retrievers to the essential goddesses that are at the heart of Rhodes work. The bronze creatures are perched everywhere in the sitting room and as the overcast sky sneaks in through the skylight, the dappling of grey hues adds a dimension of mysticism to the creatures that seem to crawl, dangle, surrender, maneuver, leap, sprawl and dance across their earthbound bases.



"Oh! How I dreamt of things impossible" William Blake

The Intangible in Bronze

Renee Rhodes *by Nancy LaMar Rodgers photos A. Vincent Scarano*

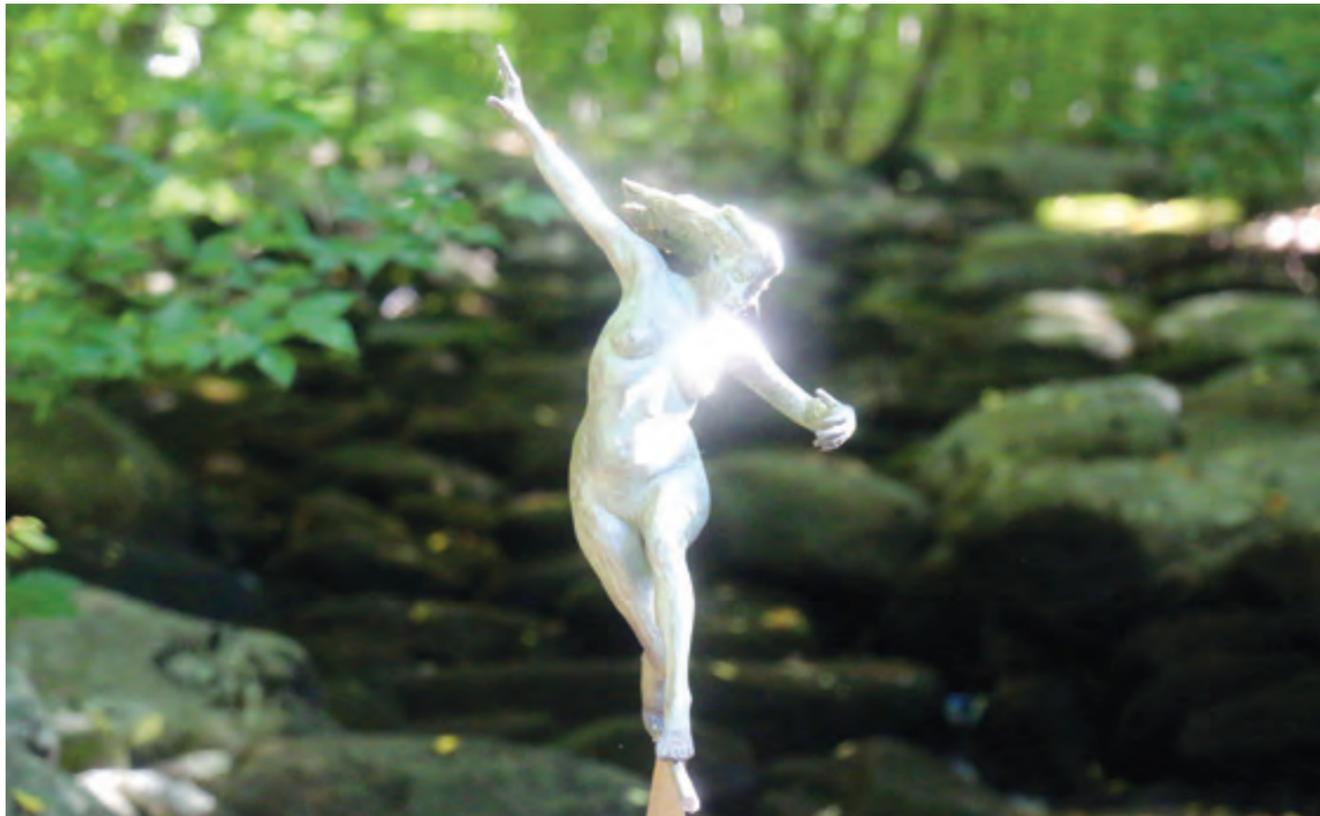
Winding up the driveway to the house that sits atop the hill, I can't imagine what awaits me. The home itself is a glorious hodgepodge of architectural structure and design. Renee Rhodes

unforeseen forces. As a young woman in her twenties, Rhodes worked for a well-known advertising agency in Manhattan. A job, she says, that almost killed her. "Literally my intestines

blew up from the stress and from the inauthenticity of that world. But I was in my twenties and I had to support myself but I knew that I couldn't continue in that world." With a severance deal, Renee decided to pursue an education at Columbia in psychology. She knew in her core that she wanted to do something to help people and this path seemed to be the most logical.

"I realized that the work that I was in was meaningless and I wanted to do something meaningful." Although Rhodes had an idea of what she wanted to do she was at a juncture.

"I knew I wanted to help people, but there are many paths to that." After a great deal of mental anguish and inward contemplation she ended up getting into Columbia but admits that the





Rhodes not only graduated from Columbia with a Doctorate, but also went on to do a fellowship at Yale, where she did research and wrote countless publications on her findings.

When Renee moved into private practice she knew only one thing to be true in the therapeutic relationship. As she explains, "If you can authentically connect with another human being, then that is where the actual work can be done."

It is for this reason that Rhodes experienced what she experienced in her office in Middletown. As unexplainable as it is to her, her spirit, her psyche was open enough to the possibility of divine intervention. Her soul understood that therapy, like art, sometimes comes from a place that one cannot name, a place that is not tangible, or palpable and perhaps it is in this place that the healing magic begins.

path to the doctorate program was grueling. "I was doing all this grounded theory work and decided that I just wanted to study 'stuff' and see what it tells me." Rhodes throws the word "stuff" out there as if she were talking about banality and mundane pursuits. This is a woman who has put her ego aside. Eventually

In private practice Rhodes began her life's work of helping to guide others, but she was also interested in figuring how and why she was in this place. "I realized I had accumulated all of



these armadilloesque shells and bit by bit they began falling off and I was in my office in Middletown when I had my first vision of Kali." Rhodes goes on to describe what she thought at the time must have been some hallucination of the Hindu goddess of destruction and creation. According to Hindu mythology, Mother Kali is the liberator of souls who looks to remove the ego in order that someone can "detach from the notion of the body being anything permanent and look instead to the spirit as being eternal."





of her own ego. "I had never done anything with art before, drawing, painting, nothing and here I was sculpting this clay into these figures of women." Rhodes remembers spending hours, in what she recalls as a snowstorm that left her stranded in her office alone for an entire evening.

Now for a highly educated psychologist, this situation was

For Renee, the experience was surreal. "There she was, this 9ft tall black woman holding the earth above her head and looking at me as if to say 'are you paying attention?'"

Rhodes had no idea what this vision meant nor did she feel as if she was in control of anything at that moment. What she did know was that she had to go down to the art store and get some clay. Having absolutely no experience with art in any form, Rhodes understands that her work comes from some force outside

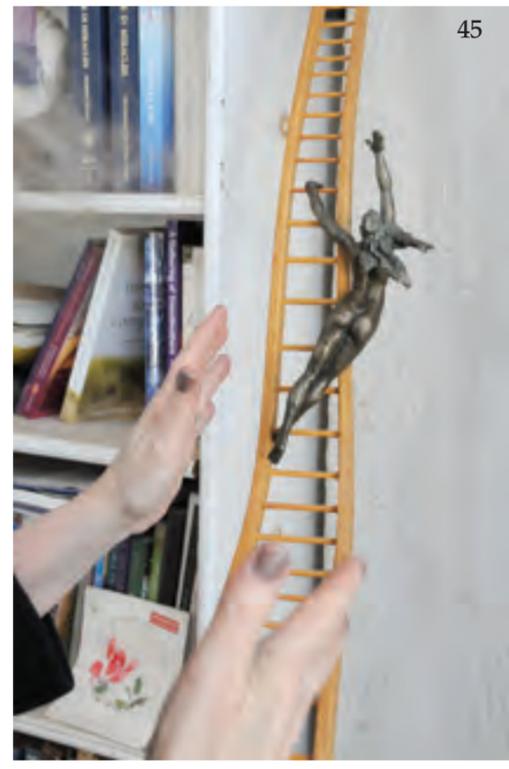
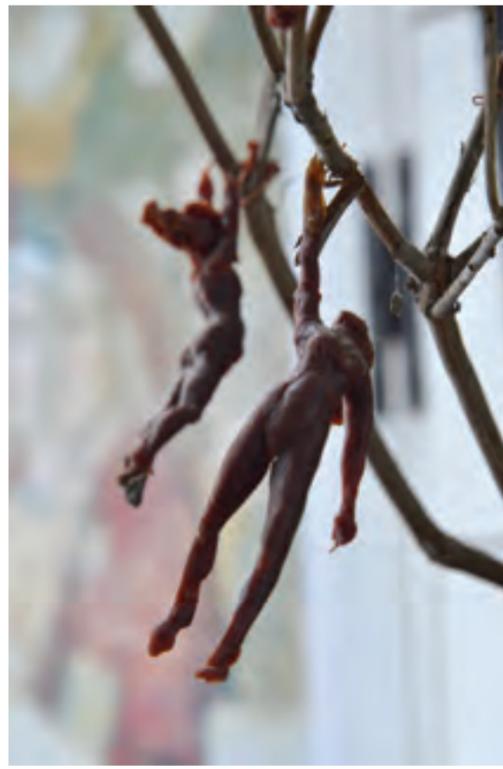


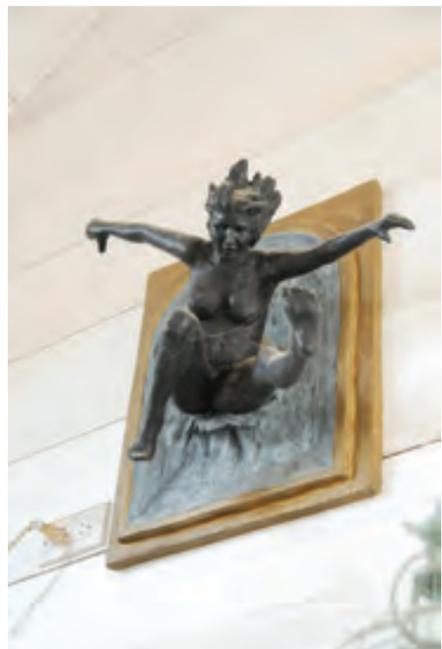
tough to wrap her intellectual mind around. She questioned her own sanity in the beginning and contemplated every diagnosis she could possibly find to explain the vision and her sudden ability to sculpt clay into these masterful figures. "Honestly I didn't know what was happening, but I think that spiritually I was in a place where most of my human relationships had let me down and perhaps I was fascinated by the appearance of this goddess and figured, well why not,



maybe she knows something about my life that I don't." Rhodes explains that she didn't even know who Kali was and that she had to rely on research to find an illustration of the goddess who stood in her office on that life-changing day. "I think it was a spiritual emergency for me. I was somehow lost but emerging at the same time and I started sculpting these women with horseheads and for me that was symbolic of me regaining my power. I realized that I was being given an opportunity to express myself in a

way that I don't have words for. I still don't understand any of it, because it is a force moving through me." Rhodes spent the next few months holed up in the cabin on her property.





She cut herself off from the world and allowed whatever energy was moving through her to continue. She describes the scene in the cabin, "no running water, no electricity, just me and my green clay and endless figurines of these women and these sculptures everywhere, they were literally taking over the cabin." Rhodes laughs her signature, self deprecating laugh and states that "It sounds so crazy and I don't think I would believe it if it wasn't actually happening to me."

Curious now about art and its many forms, Rhodes decided that maybe she needed to educate herself. "I finally realized that maybe if I was going to continue with this art path that I might want to take a class and so I went to Lyme Academy and I received such powerful feedback from my mentors who encouraged me to



continue my work and to see it through."

Today Rhodes continues with her private practice, something she has never stopped doing and describes her practice as an integral part of her art. "I still see patients every day and my work, the relationships, the trust, the healing is all part of what I also do with my artwork. My spiritual practice, and my work with people and my sculpture are inseparable, they are all intertwined."

Her current focus for her sculptures is the voice of the trees. She has brought nature into her studio and explains that there is a message that she hopes to relay with this latest exhibit.

"We need to wake up, don't you think? I mean what is happening with our earth?" Rhodes has been spending time just listening to and weaving these goddesses into the trees, allowing them to get the message out. "I came into the sunroom one day and I had these branches propped up. There was this small lamp on the floor and it projected the branches onto the wall and made it so that they appeared to be 20 ft. high. I thought to myself, ok so the shadow is realer than my sculpture and the different realms are working together. This is powerful." For Rhodes the message she is trying to convey is more important than the work itself. She understands that she is just the physical being



that these spiritual and timeless voices are moving through, but historically, hasn't this been the case for the most extraordinary artists that the world has ever known. Renee would laugh at that notion, but she sums it up in the only way a clinical psychologist and artist can do with words. "It's about getting the ego out of the way and realizing that some things are just bigger than we are and if we are brave enough to just sit quiet and listen, well then..."

Indeed, if we are brave enough, I think to myself, what great things may come?

Renee's work can be seen at: reneerhodes.com

