

# GWEN MARCUS CREATES A TEMPEST



*The Tempest*, 2014, bronze, 88 x 26 x 40 in. (not including its 10-inch-high bronze base), available from the artist

Last November, the artist Gwen Marcus (b. 1955) unveiled *The Tempest*, an 8-foot-high bronze sculpture of a lithe man leaning into a gale. Balanced gracefully on his right foot, his muscles straining and hair streaming, this dynamic figure evokes, yet does not illustrate, Shakespeare's play of the same title. Made using the traditional "lost wax" method, *The Tempest* took Marcus two and a half years to complete — a remarkable feat not only of virtuosity, but also of patience, and — because it was not commissioned — of personal commitment.

This project is the latest evidence of Marcus's longtime dedication to the human figure. *The Tempest* is somewhat unusual, though, as most of her sculptures depict women (both nude and draped), including a recent series of what she calls "strong, real black women — confident and proud." Coming of age in an era when young sculptors generally favored abstraction or conceptualism, Marcus sought out figurative mentors while training at New York University, the Rhode Island School of Design, Art Students League of New York, and National Academy of Design. (She also studied privately with the classically trained masters Clemente Spampinato, Bruno Lucchesi, Edgar Whitney, and Isaac Soyer.)

Marcus lives and works in New York City, where she can savor great art of all periods in museums and galleries, and also study human movement during public dance performances. Moreover, she travels widely, seeking out additional sculptures and dances everywhere she goes. Marcus's works can be found in museums and private collections worldwide, and she is represented by Cheryl Newby Gallery (Pawleys Island, SC), Greenberg Fine Art (Santa Fe), and Southport Galleries (Southport, CT).

## A COMPLEX PROCESS

Beginning with only a concept, Marcus hires a model and watches closely, relying on her deep experience in drawing and anatomical observation to arrive at the most pleasing pose, which must pass muster from every possible angle. "The most important reason to work with a live model," she explains, "is to stimulate the emotional and visual energy that makes the sculpture live. It is the inner energy that gives a work its true individuality. It is not formed on the surface, but pulled from its inner core, a life force from within. That's one reason why each sculpture has its own energy ... no two are alike."

Having established the emotional impact that the composition will convey, Marcus sets to work with her clay. As the figure takes shape, she moves around it, checking to ensure the observer will "be drawn in by the rhythm of the life force in the piece. Good figurative sculpture is like music," she believes, "with the composition providing the strength, rhythm, and energy. As the eye travels, it slows down, speeds up, pauses and lingers, but never stops." Marcus is particularly admired for her sensitive treatment of human flesh, all of which is finalized before drapery is applied to delight the eye with textural contrasts.

Rather than explain the rest of Marcus's technical process in words, we asked her to share photographs of what she considers the most revealing moments in the evolution of *The Tempest*. These are intended to help readers of *Fine Art Connoisseur* better understand just how complex her process is, and why it ultimately took Marcus two and a half years to bring this virtuosic sculpture to fruition. ●

Peter Trippi is editor-in-chief of *Fine Art Connoisseur*.



**CLAY SCULPTED:** Marcus develops the original clay version, working with the live model and referring regularly to her small bronze maquette, visible in the background. Once she is finished, a silicone rubber mold of this clay form is made.



**PLASTER REMOVED:** A fabricator removes the plaster ("the mother mold") from the rubber mold. This plaster retains the form of the rubber mold; the aluminum rods visible here provide extra support to the plaster.



**MOLD REMOVED:** The rubber mold is removed from the original clay, which is itself destroyed during this process.



**WAX REWORKED:** The rubber mold is moved to the foundry, where wax is poured into it. Marcus then reworks the dried wax form. Here her reworked wax awaits "gating," during which wax sprues will be attached so that molten bronze will flow evenly later in the process.



**WAX DIPPED:** One by one, sections of the wax form are dipped in a slurry mixture of silica and mulgrain to encase them in a thick ceramic shell. This is repeated 12 times and requires drying between each dip. Once placed in the hot kiln, the wax "burns out" to leave behind a hard ceramic, thus the term "lost wax method."



**METAL POURED:** Molten bronze is poured into the ceramic shell, and then is left to cool.



**METAL REWORKED:** The raw metal form is hoisted to a standing position so that its pieces can be assembled.



**METAL CHASED:** Marcus and the fabricators use precision tools to chase the raw metal, which means refining it, disguising its joints, and restoring its texture.



**PATINA APPLIED:** Marcus creates the patina by stippling thin chemical transparencies onto the surface with a brush and heating them with a blowtorch so that they adhere. It took her several weeks to apply these layers of reds, yellows, and greens, which have succeeded in creating the varied shadows and sense of depth she sought.