

INTERVIEW: BEVERLY PEPPER

James Barron: You met David Smith during the Spoleto Festival in 1962. What was he like?

Beverly Pepper: David was fabulous. We spent a lot of time together. He helped me get my start by recommending me for a major steel sculpture commission. David always worked with the human scale but I frequently worked larger.

JB: It must have made quite an impression, a young woman working with Cor-Ten steel in the 60s and 70s.

BP: I actually helped test and pioneer Cor-ten at US steel. But David was not working in Cor-ten, nor was I then. We were both working in stainless and carbon steel.

JB: Are these Messenger sculptures related in some way to Smith?

BP: Not at all. They are more related to Giacometti. But they don't really have an artistic root as such--Smith was more interested in assembling disparate parts and I was more drawn to unified organic forms.

JB: You've lived in Todi for decades, close to Etruscan sites. These Messenger sculptures have a similar timelessness – as if they've been unearthed.

BP: I like that.

JB: What do you mean by calling them Messengers?

BP: Messengers literally go between a sender and a receiver who are not in the same place. They arrive with news from elsewhere. It could be this world it could be another. Once they arrive, things are changed. They tell us that change is possible.

JB: Do you have an idea of how one of these sculptures might look before you start?

BP: No. I don't have a design or pre-conceived ideas. It evolves like a drawing. The hand follows the mind. They happen simultaneously, and there is sometimes the benefit of divine accident. If I know in advance what it's going to look like, I don't make the work. As with drawing, you accept or reject a great deal. It has a lot to do with the subconscious. While I am making the works, they *become*.

JB: How do you know when the work is completed?

BP: I continue to work on a piece until it is what it wants to be. I keep working until I have nothing more to add.