

Linda Yamamoto

b.1957, Yokohama, Japan, lives in Honolulu, O'ahu
exhibited in *Biennial II*

Life Lessons, 2005-2012

bronze with patina

Life Lessons, is a cross between *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, Hieronymus Bosch, Sigmund Freud, the Buddhist ink paintings of Abbot Toba, and my own life experience. I had originally envisioned the frogs to all be teachers or mentors, but as the work developed I began to see them as a part of a broader spectrum. A few of them are teachers and mentors but then there are their guests who are friends, friends of friends, acquaintances, the hang-arounders, and the uninvited. The baby is witnessing various acts and behaviors far beyond its ability to fully grasp and yet will process this information in a way that shapes its future reality. It is the beginning of a longer story, and I don't know how it ends just yet. But it seems to me that it's probably not a good idea to leave your baby alone with a bunch of frogs as they tend to be capricious, rowdy, lacking in good manners and common sense.

FRANK SHERIFF *new name: Linda Yamamoto*

*Born 1957 in Yokohama, Japan
Lives in Honolulu, O'ahu*

The son of an American father who was a civilian employee with the United States Army and Air Force Exchange Service and a Japanese-American mother, Frank Sheriff moved to Honolulu as a teenager with his family in 1973 after a transient childhood spent living in many places, including Japan, Korea, Nevada, California, New York, Texas, North Carolina, and Oregon.

In high school Sheriff took a few ceramics classes but mostly studied mathematics and the sciences in preparation for college. Never having adjusted to living in Hawai'i, Sheriff was anxious to leave and in 1975 enrolled at Oregon State University in Corvallis with a major in forestry management. However, Sheriff had second thoughts about this career direction when the training he was receiving, which seemed oriented towards jobs with large corporations interested in making profits from the land, conflicted with his own ideals of environmentalism and conservation. Disillusioned, Sheriff quit school in 1977 and went to work in the field, taking various jobs such as planting trees with reforestation crews and trimming and shaping commercial Christmas trees. Although he enjoyed living in rural areas and working outdoors, the work was for the most part seasonal, sporadic and physically grueling. Sheriff couldn't see himself being fulfilled over a working lifetime by such endeavors, and so he decided to go back to Oregon State University to pursue something he enjoyed without thinking about where it might lead in terms of a career.

Sheriff had continued his interest in ceramics and explored making small functional pieces in the campus craft center while he had been studying forestry. Sheriff signed up as an art major, taking classes in life drawing and painting, but had a hard time reconciling what he was doing with the work ethic that his father had instilled in him—that doing something that was fun and seemed like play could have any connection to work and career. At Christmas 1979 Sheriff returned to Hawai'i to visit his family, dreading to break the news that he had decided to become an artist, only to discover that his father was gravely ill in the hospital. When his father died a few weeks later, Sheriff decided to move back to Hawai'i from Oregon in order to be closer to his family.

After working for a while with his brother in a tee-shirt business, Sheriff decided to continue his art training and enrolled at the University of Hawai'i-Mānoa in 1981. Sheriff didn't have an affinity for painting—he couldn't get used to the notion of positioning his vision from one place, trying to create an illusion of space from one vantage point—but he was attracted to learning the techniques of welding and bronze-casting and entered the sculpture program. He liked working with metals and putting things together, but his work had no clear direction, vacillating between grand abstract formal assemblages influenced by sculptors such as Mark di Suvero, Michael Heizer and

Isamu Noguchi, and distorted figurative works which reflected his interest in R. Crumb and the world of underground comics. The chance opportunity to meet and spend time with one of his art heroes—Isamu Noguchi—about the time he received his bachelor's degree in 1984 helped spur Sheriff on in his goal to achieve recognition as a sculptor. Sheriff considered doing graduate work at a mainland school, but his remembrance of his unrooted existence growing up and a new-found sense of being part of the community in Hawai'i convinced him to stay and continue at UH-Mānoa, from which he received a master's degree in 1989.

A seminal event which would lead to Sheriff's finding and developing his own aesthetic as a sculptor occurred during his graduate years when he was accepted as an artist-in-residence in the University of Georgia Study Abroad Program in Cortona, Italy in 1988. Traveling in Europe provided Sheriff his first opportunity to experience the major artists in the history of art in the great museums but also exposure to a lot of contemporary art firsthand. However, settled in Italy Sheriff began to feel more intrigued by things he saw just walking down the streets than the cutting-edge contemporary work he had seen in London, Berlin and Venice. He found himself studying elaborate, decorative bronze doorknockers on houses, exquisitely made reliquaries for sacred mementos in church sanctuaries, and ornate shrines to the Madonna or saints on the sides of buildings. Sheriff was attracted to

the intimate scale and fine craftsmanship he found in these objects, and when he returned to Hawai'i he began making sculptures of miscellaneous found or appropriated elements which he cast in bronze and welded together. Sheriff's experience in Italy and the process it engendered also tapped into something from his youth. As a boy, Sheriff was intrigued by the world of custom cars and was an avid fan of assembling model cars. Eventually he had dresser drawers full of model parts and spare pieces which he would combine and alter, creating his own customized toy vehicles.

Sheriff's sculpture aesthetic and manner of working are informed by aspects of these past influences and experiences. Usually he begins with a general idea for a work and then searches for materials through his collection of objects found and gathered over time—bits and pieces such as toy animals and figures, game pieces, balusters, scrolled brackets and paw feet from furniture, wings and wheels from models, columns and cornices from cake decorations—assembling these in various combinations and relationships until he discovers the rationale and narrative in a work. Then he casts the parts in rubber or plaster molds from which he can replicate endless numbers of wax models to be cut, carved and manipulated into the fantastic hybrid forms he favors. The wax elements are dismantled and cast in bronze, the metal pieces cleaned and chased to reveal their exceptional detail, reassembled and welded into place. As a last step Sheriff applies a patina or coloration to unify the surface of the work. Sheriff has something of a tinkerer's disposition, and he likes the give and take of his materials

and processes which allow him to tear apart and change a sculpture until it is just right.

The recent work, *Ark*, in this exhibition is a classic example of the improbable machines and vehicles which form a recurrent theme in Sheriff's work. A monumental-looking architectural structure rides on a set of wheels, punctuated by tiny windows and surmounted by smokestacks. A large rudder is affixed to each end, and on either side are bird wings which flap up and down alternately facing in opposing directions. The beauty of the artist's invention belies its subtle commentary as a symbol of modern civilization. Sheriff's ark is a bearer of our contemporary cultural baggage and spoofs the notion of technology so overblown and futile that progress is impossible.

Sheriff's love of gadgetry is also evident in *Mega-Man*, which was inspired by the popular toys that transform themselves from normal-looking vehicles into monstrous superhuman figures. Sheriff's version takes this conceit to an extreme as we see the form mutating into a figure of grotesque and absurd complexity beneath a tiny realistic head. *Mega-Man* is Sheriff's cynicism-tinged response to the penchant in contemporary society for mega-everything (megahits, megamalls, megabucks, etc.)—that things need to be bigger than, better than, when being average, normal, regular is no longer acceptable, even thinkable.

Narrating in bronze, Sheriff makes subtle commentaries on the follies and foibles of our time. With a sense of play he mixes and matches disparate elements to tell a tale that is dead-on serious in its implications but nevertheless fascinating fun in its delivery. Sheriff's extravagant creations are believable because they are so thoroughly crafted and convincingly realized.



FRANK SHERIFF

Dimensions are listed in inches, height x width x depth.

Vehicle #2, 1992

bronze

18 x 26 x 16

Collection of the City and County of Honolulu

Holy Roller, 1994

bronze

15 x 27 x 12

Ark, 1995

bronze

24 x 24 x 22³/₄

Mega-Man, 1995

bronze

41 x 20 x 15

Alchemic Appliance, 1995

bronze

16¹/₂ x 15 x 13

The Great Machine Revisited, 1995

bronze

40 x 12 x 12

Vehicle #6, 1995

steel and bronze

60 x 21 x 36

Vehicle #7, 1995

steel, bronze and wood

60 x 21 x 36