



Sitting in her expansive studio in San Francisco's Outer Richmond district, Gay Outlaw explains that pursuing art as a career had not initially crossed her mind. Surprisingly, she reveals, "My father was a police commissioner when I was growing up... I was a really good girl!" Raised in Alabama, her earliest

experiences with making objects centered on handcrafts, such as needlepoint and embroidery. She also particularly enjoyed creating sweets—like cookies, cupcakes or pralines. Graduating from the University of Virginia, where she majored in French language, she then opted to attend École de Cuisine La Varenne, Paris, France, feeling it would mesh perfectly with her family's involvement in the food business. Her life entered a new chapter when she returned to the US, and tried on various careers in New York; not finding a particular fit, she began studying art at night, and discovered a program at the International Center of Photography in Manhattan. Eventually she quit her day job to pursue its one year, full-time, general studies program.

Outlaw moved out West when her husband accepted a job in San Francisco. Establishing a darkroom at Hunters Point, she began to exhibit her photographic work. She also found her way into a few classes at San Francisco Art Institute, including one taught in 1992 by Paul Kos, who gave the students an assignment: "We were supposed to make a generous work of art out of something we'd never used before, from our past." Outlaw "baked a cake, in the form of an architectural flourish... a finial, and installed it on the building. It was 20 layers," she recalls. "I called it *20-Layer Finial*. I installed it... and then we ate it!" she laughs.

The transition from photography to sculpture was abrupt; as she recalls, "I went directly from one to another." With a touch of the absurd, she investigated minimalist concerns with materials such as puff pastry. A highlight of that period was an outdoor, site-specific installation *Tinned Wall/Dark Matter* (1995-97) at Yerba Buena Center, where the artist recreated a serpentine wall; with a core of fruitcake, the construction was encased in a layer of tin sheeting. "Thomas Jefferson founded the University of Virginia... and invented the serpentine wall as a brick-saving device," she explains, adding: "They're so beautiful."

Outlaw soon learned to work with wax and bronze, and courses at Pilchuck School provided a good overview of glass techniques. Reflecting on the shift from one medium to another, the artist observes, "One thing about photography is that you have the negative, so you're always working from negative to positive... it's the same part of your brain that works with mold-making."

In 1998 she created the massive *Black Hose Mountain*, an additive sculpture built from lengths of dishwasher hosing. This over 10-foot-high object revealed "unforeseen optical qualities." Others were also impressed, and Outlaw received the prestigious SECA award from SFMOMA in 1999. Something about the pattern of the voids held a strong attraction for her, and she soon embarked on a series of works investigating cubes riddled with holes. These works echo the strong geometries of minimalist sculptors such as David Smith, but with a

quirkier interpretation. She has continued to explore the theme in many incarnations, eventually creating positive forms—in glass, ceramic, and bronze—from the voids.

In recent years she's had a particular interest in *pâte de verre*, in which a mold is coated with a paste of "frit," crushed glass, then fired in the kiln. Works such as *Lovers* (2012) use the technique to create vividly-hued objects with organic forms, this piece with a slumping human presence suggesting biological functions and psychological interdependence.

For her current exhibition "Home," on view at San Francisco's Gallery Paule Anglim, the artist has included *pâte de verre*, wood, bronze and a technique using frit in combination with bent plywood and epoxy. Work based on the bucket-shaped form of "a chair I had when I was a child" appears in many guises, from the citrus-inspired *Wedge* (2014) to the suspended, orange and purple vortex *Abyss* (2014), to *Street View* (2014), incorporating an image of the artist's house taken from Google Maps.

Clearly an independent thinker, is there perhaps more than a bit of "outlaw" in Gay, after all? "I don't want to remake what others have made," she states. "Maybe you have to find a way to transgress in order to find an original voice as an artist."

—BARBARA MORRIS



Above: Gay Outlaw in her studio

Right: "Street View," 2014

Glass, epoxy, plywood, hardwood, steel, 64" x 27" x 27"

Photos: courtesy Gallery Paule Anglim