

# Victory of the Upright: The Work of Lydia Musco

An essay on Lydia Musco's work should use the following words: balance, touch, rising, and beauty. All of this is present and more. There is also strength, delicacy, tension, and a resourceful intelligence.

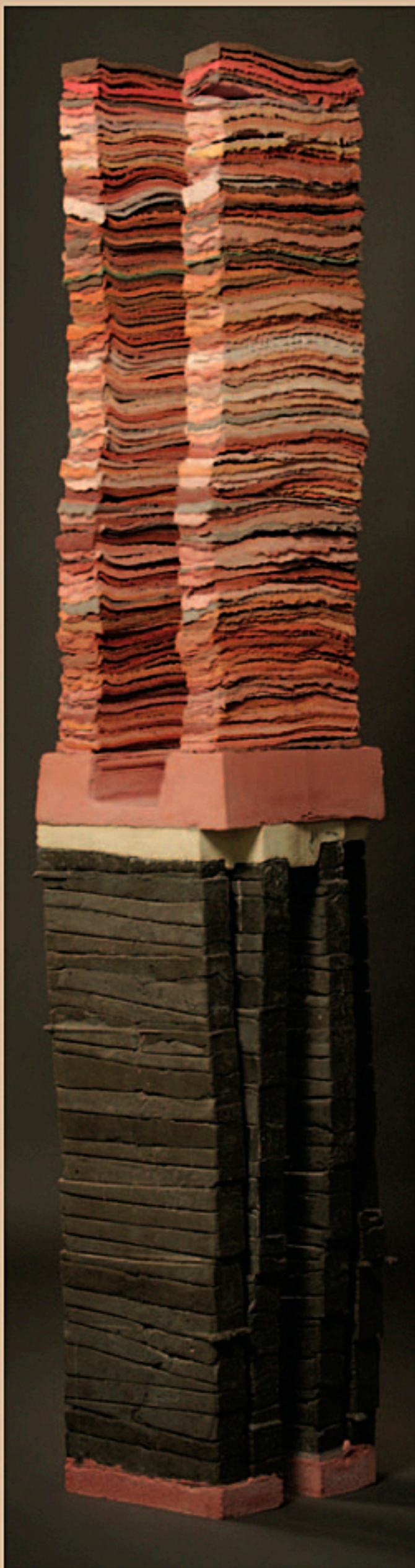
Musco's early work was elegant. It captured space in a hollow and had a worked, honed, feel to it. I knew when I visited her studio in Vermont years ago that what I was seeing was something real, something rigorously structured and deeply meaningful, appearing at one moment to be formed and in another to be found. It was sculpture that was necessary, work molded by hand, not based upon trends found in the latest art magazines. It was not a sculpture that wanted to be translated, as it already was. The associations were deep, rich, and unforgettable.

That feeling is still present in her current body of work. Musco's work continues to reveal each thing she discovers. A practice of traditional joinery, of material possibility; each becomes part of the story and part of the essence. The joints create space, thereby defining its *place*. The materials have color, which brings about associations with the natural and built environments. Her work shows its age; it is of its time.

Years ago the sculptor Judy Pfaff and I were talking about how when an artist looks back on his/her own work, specific periods are measured by the tools and processes that were used at a particular time: "That was the year of the router, that was the time of the bandsaw...." It was like seeing things and associating them to the Iron Age or the Bronze Age. In Musco's work, memories and associations flood back in a similar fashion. This is the time of the upright.

You can feel the sculptures' acceptance. They nod as they see themselves. And they are connected to a beautiful lineage of real sculpture. These are real sculptures, real work. Some are tired, heavy, yet some are light and quirky, resolute yet unconquered. They are standing. A Victory for the Upright.

One of the many reasons to feel so positively, to champion this sculptor, is that she mines a very deep and very rich vein in art-making. Everything is solidly developed from one sculpture to the next. No flights of fancy, no silliness, but important physical manifestations and the noble qualities of work. Musco knows the dignity of labor.



Her work stands, it arises, and in that supreme effort she makes her claim. These are beautiful works that add to the heritage of real, inventive sculpture, something important, something rare. It is something many of us hope will continue, and with Musco it does.

There is a slipping quality when you stack and build. There's that moment of tension where things begin to move physically and sometimes metaphorically. Some might call it a "frozen moment," but in Musco's work it is different; it is an acknowledgment of force, of grace, of gravity, of delicacy, fragility; and yet the moment that proves the strength of conviction.

That moment stays with you as a sculptor, and the thing is to convey it to the viewer, that slipping moment and the physical weight, the gravity of the material and the effort. That is an important thing, the evidence of effort. A struggle itself doesn't assure success; it is a hedge against failure, especially the failure of complacency.

I can never escape the impression of figure, with all its tragedy, sadness and hope, when I look at Musco's work. That impression slips and slides, moving like an apparition from the corners of what I see, what I know and what I remember in the space and crevices of her sculptures. An impression I hold on to, never to be dismissed. It helps me to retain her work and demands attention, for it surely is a triumph.

My mind wanders, and I enjoy that these days. I spend a great deal of time working and thinking of myth, heroes, and epic. I keep coming back to thoughts of Hector, Andromache, and Astyanax.

In Lydia Musco's work I feel something similar. That feeling is created by that tense space in her sculptures and the coming together of two strong bodies creating that new hope. It is formed by equals, dependant on rising, struggle and pressure. It is a feeling of growth and aspiration by the emergent couple.

Ed Smith—2009

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*Three-sided square on four walls, 2009, concrete and paper pulp, 79 x 14 x 14 inches*