



*Birds of Passage* at HarborArts (with Steve Israel, Ann O'Hara), 2013, sheet brass, cable, stainless steel, existing masonry wall, 20' x 16' x 5" (photo by B. Amore).

# A LAYING ON OF HANDS

## B. AMORE CARVES OUT COMPASSION

While still a young single mother, B. Amore traveled to the fabled marble quarries of Carrara, Italy, to master stone carving. After several years teaching at Boston's School of the Museum of Fine Arts, she founded the Carving Studio and Sculpture Center in West Rutland, Vermont, a nationally renowned school of year-round instruction in stone, steel and sculptural processes. Amore's earlier abstract public and large-scale works in

marble and granite already took her far from traditional stone carving. A child of East Boston and heir to a deeply rooted Italian immigrant tradition infused with art, expressive language and song, she rehabilitates the past by breathing new life into old objects and telling stories through them.

Her own installations build outward from her own family's immigrant origins. As a maker, curator and collaborator on community-defining projects, she

empowers others to define their own narratives, not simply as a transit between two points, but as a complex journey full of wandering, self-discovery and self-renewal.

Not by coincidence, Amore has given the name "Odyssey" to two major exhibitions and the books they have spawned. In "LifeLine," a six-room installation at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum at Ellis Island in New York, she assembled the old-world finery and trinkets stashed in the

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East Boston attic of her grandmother, Concettina De Iorio, contextualizing them with the museum's archives of other turn-of-the century passages of first generation Italians from Southern Italy. In a more recent project, she clandestinely delivered boxes and art supplies to illegal migrant dairy

## THE IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE IS A METAPHOR FOR THE HUMAN JOURNEY

workers in Northern Vermont and encouraged them to build dioramas. The still-traveling exhibition and book, "Invisible Odysseys," gives a face to the dangers of desert border-crossings and a voice to the farm-workers' secretive existence and yearnings for home.

Amore's images often return to the hand as the powerful manipulator of materials, the generator of the image and the conduit of the loving touch. A ground-breaker in combining processes and materials, she thinks additively, mounting city flotsam on tin panels, bronzing discarded work-gloves, wrapping stones with silk organza and impregnating silk and stones with her photographs of human faces of all races.

In December 2013, in the studio building in Waltham where she had once carved stone, I interviewed B. Amore:

**EM: How long have you been including work-gloves in your reliefs?**

BA: Actually, I found the first one in a quarry here in Vermont, and then I started noticing them on the sidewalks and street in New York. From there, I began to notice other remnants of paper and trash on the street, which I then integrated into the work.

**EM: The tin ceiling panels also suggest a specific scale.**

BA: I came up with the 2" x 2" size of the silk faces because of the scale of the squares on the tin in the "Stepping Stone panels." I actually love working large, but there are issues of time, storage and the fact that I like to be involved in the art process ... I've always worked directly, even on the largest 11-foot-tall stones, making marks with both hand tools and power tools, that personalize and humanize the stone, and bring the viewer into the larger piece through the intimate touch.

**EM: Why tin?**

BA: The first tin that I used had covered the windows of the Tenement Museum [in NYC] for over 50 years. The form of the arched tin from the windows gave form to the triptychs – a completely unexpected development, as I had never worked with the "box" format before. I love the tin because of the sense of lived history – The same with the gloves. I never alter the gesture in which I find the glove.



*The Other Shore*, 2010, Danby Marble, Indian Granite, steel, 11' x 4.5' x 3' (photo by B. Amore).

**EM: How did you start "Invisible Odysseys," the Mexican migrant worker project?**

BA: I read an article in a local paper about undocumented workers in Vermont and Western Mass and was excited about doing a project with immigration in my home state. Originally, I thought I would collect their stories and make installations, but when I heard Ismael recounting his story of crossing the desert, and how the stones cut his feet, the howling wind, the skulls in the moonlight, I felt that he should tell his own story. I sent him paints, photos of outsider artists' work, and asked him to make a representation of the journey. I "recruited" the artists – none of the workers had ever formally made art in the past, but they had grown up in a culture rich with artistic expression.

They all live in the shadows of the larger society, and are barely visible in Vermont life, as they feel that they are "imprisoned" on the farms. The project gave them a unique opportunity to tell their own stories, in their own words. It has been exhibited at the Vermont State Conference on Immigration, the Vermont Folklife Center, the Bent Northrop Memorial Library in Fairfield, Vermont and also at M Gallery at Middlebury College.

**EM: How does this work relate to your independent work as an artist?**

BA: I think that the Mexican project ties in completely with "Opening Windows in Time at the Tenement Museum," the "LifeLine" exhibit at Ellis Island, the "Naples – New York" exhibit at Hofstra University and "Birds of Passage" at HarborArts. Even the "Chelsea Creek Clipper" piece in East Boston is tied into the immigration work, as the community groups that I worked with were composed of old and new immigrants – the older Italian and the newer Hispanic. The immigration experience is a metaphor for the human journey that we are all on, whether we choose to recognize it or not.

Elizabeth Michelman