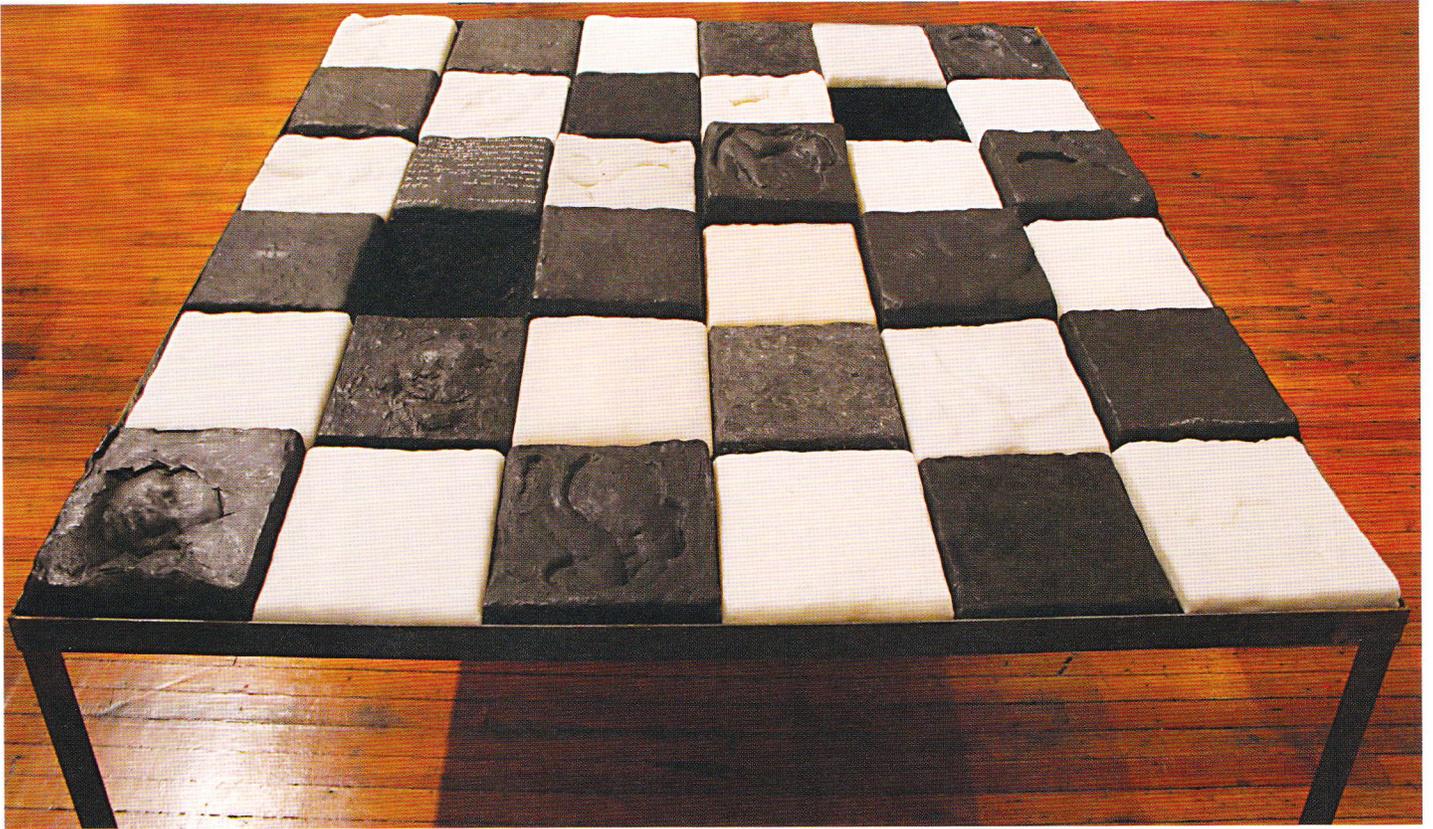


The Work of Artist Noa Shay

by Denise L. Greene



A game of queens; pregnant women on dice; beautifully-rendered features of newborns; sugar and salt; the movement of time; lasting and ephemeral. These phrases and images describe Noa Shay's (pronounced Shy) work. Her sophisticated treatment of these symbols invites us to venture deeper, under the forms; to examine the rich juxtapositions of opposites: the strength of women with the vulnerability of newborns, the permanence of sugar and salt throughout the world with its soluble nature. Her images are made memorable by her development of the tensions between linked pairs of opposites.

An artist from Israel, Noa creates work from many layers of inspiration: music, culture, place, identity, friends, and strangers. She works with various materials, including clay, stone, paper, resin, metal, sugar, and salt. Noa says that each material has its own life, its own tendencies, its own potentials, so each work demands its own discovery of the form it will take.

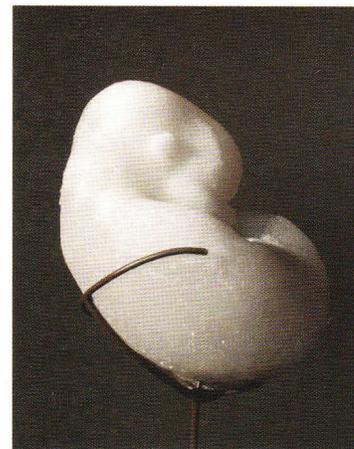
Chess began to take form after Noa saw 3D sonograms of babies in the womb. It was further inspired by her recollection of an Israeli song based on the poem *Chess* by Hanokh Levine. It expresses the turbulence of Israel. In the first stanza of Levine's poem, translated here, the audience is left contemplating the innocence of babies alongside the knowledge that some will never grow old because kings play chess with their lives. (Note that in Hebrew, 'black' and 'white' are colors, and don't carry racial connotations as in the United States.) With these memories and images, Noa created a chessboard with missing squares, black and white squares with fetuses, with the *Chess* poem written in Hebrew.

Chess by Hanokh Levine

Where has my son gone
Gone is my dear son
A black soldier beats a white soldier
He will not return, my father
Return my father will no other
A black soldier beats a white soldier
Tears indoors and silence in the green
The king is playing with the queen

Noa followed her 'game of kings' with *Game of Queens*, a series of pregnant women on dice. They were inspired by the 'Venus' fertility figurines from ancient times. She uses fertility as a metaphor for transformation, creativity, and strength. The exaggerated bellies are used to depict the emotional and physical weight on the women. The appearance of strength and self-determination shown in the women is contrasted by the surrender of their bodies to pregnancy—a gamble of biology, of choice, of life. The piece seems to ask, "How much control?"

Expanding on the themes of pregnancy, time, and control, *Front/Five Matriarchs* is a relief piece made in salt and framed by steel. The name alludes to the four matriarchs of Judaism (Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel) and to the contemporary peace movement in Israel started by four mothers of soldiers. Again, Noa used the tension of opposites: the permanence of steel juxtaposed against the instability of salt, suggesting



the freezing of time (as in the biblical story of Lot's wife); the vulnerability of the fetuses, which might eventually become the hardened front line of some future war; giving double meaning to the "front" used in the title.

Softening her viewpoint from the harshness of kings and strength of queens, Noa then returned her attention to fetuses. The fetuses represent tenderness. She explains, "the child, which is a theme I have been dealing with in my work, is a symbol of hidden wishes, hope for a future, innocence and renewal."

Alongside six other emerging sculpture artists, Noa was chosen to participate in the League's first Model to Monument program (M2M). This program places the work of League artists in public spaces. Noa's sculpture *Wish* has been placed in Riverside Park South on the Hudson River promenade between 62nd and 63rd streets. The motif of water and the Russian folktale, *The Tale of the Golden Fish*, inspired her sculpture of a fish with a baby's face in its mouth. In Pushkin's version of the tale, a poor fisherman catches a wish-granting golden fish, but his wife's greed ultimately overwhelms their good fortune. The complicated threads of wish fulfillment attracted Noa. "It's a story about wishing," she says, "[about] wishing for what you desire, wishing for too much, being caught in a net."

Sculpture—her form of expression—incorporates time, permanence, movement, and viewer involvement. She says, "Beyond concepts, people relate to sculpture because it does something to your body, your physicality. It makes you feel and move. Each sculpture has a different sense of

Opposite page: Noa Shay, *Chess*, 2006–2008, mixed media, 26 x 55 x 55 inches

This page clockwise from far left: Noa Shay, *Chess* (two details), 2006–2008, mixed media

Noa Shay, *Front/Five Matriarchs*, 2007, salt and glue, steel frame, 18 x 3 x 20 inches

Noa Shay, *Sugar Baby*, 2009, sugar crystal, 11 x 10 x 8 inches

Noa Shay, *Venus #1*, 2008, cold cast iron, 42 x 24 x 20 inches

Below right: Noa Shay with *Wish*, 2011, aluminum, 5 x 5 x 5 feet

movement, pace." Sculptures are permanent and transient, representing culture, time, place, and memories; they are records of the past and present. She has layered meanings in her work but it is important to her that the viewer finds his or her own meaning. Her work is a dialogue between artist and ideas,

forms and materials, and ultimately between the piece and the viewer.

More of Noa Shay's work can be found at www.noashay.com. 🌐

