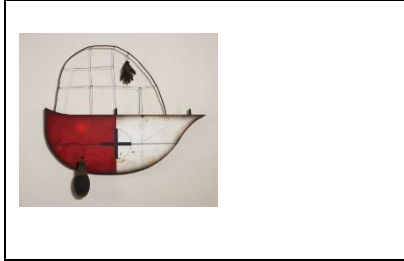

Title of Object

Crossroads Marker with Little Hand, Reaching

Photo of Object (optional)



Object Information

Artist: Renée Stout

Culture: American

Date of Object: 2015

Country: United States

Accession Number: 2016.2

File Created: 6/26/2017

Material/Medium: Metal, glass, wood, pigments, other materials

Author of File: Kathleen Steiger

Department: Arts of Africa

Reviewer of File: Kara ZumBahlen

Last Updated/Reviewed: 1/3/2018

Tour Topics

African American, Afterlife and Ancestors, Slavery, Diaspora,

Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

- This object is called an assemblage, made up of found objects that have been combined in a unique way. What different “found objects” can we identify in this work of art? What might they symbolize?
- Red, white and black are the main colors in this object. Do you see any other objects in this gallery with similar colors or symbols like the cross or the stuffed glove?
- Colors and symbols been used in this work to convey ideas reflecting African-American history. What other examples can you think of, where colors and symbols convey a story of a culture or an event?
- As a young girl, Renée Stout became fascinated by the Central African minkisi figural containers (singular form nkisi) she encountered at Pittsburgh’s Carnegie Museum while growing up in that city. Constructed of wood, fur, cloth, and other materials, the minkisi bundles held medicines and other concoctions and were considered powerful mystical receptacles. What do you see in this object that could be a “mystical receptacle”?

- Have you ever sought advice from your elders or your ancestors? What kind of objects do you use to remind you of them?

Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

From Smithsonian artist profile:

As a young girl, Renée Stout became fascinated by the Central African minkisi (singular, nkisi) figural containers she encountered at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum while growing up in that city. Constructed of wood, fur, cloth, and other materials, the minkisi bundles held medicines and other concoctions and were considered powerful mystical receptacles. However, when Stout later attended Carnegie-Mellon University, she pursued realist painting in the style of Edward Hopper and Richard Estes rather than exploring her African-American heritage in her art. Stout soon realized that her street scenes, devoid of people, were more like portraits of houses, which led her to consider the concept of house as home of the spirit, container of memories and dreams, and, by extension, a symbol of human activity and aspiration.

After graduating from Carnegie-Mellon in 1980, Stout moved to Washington, D.C., where she began developing a unique form of Kongo-inspired sculpture. Starting with simple, house-shaped boxes into which she put feathers, beadwork she herself created, tiny bones, buttons, and memorabilia of family members, Stout progressed to creating "divining tables" and room-size installations.

Stout's constructions from this period debuted in *Black Art: Ancestral Legacy*, a major traveling show that brought her national attention. In 1993 her work was given a solo exhibition at the National Museum of African Art, *Astonishment and Power*, in conjunction with a survey of Kongo minkisi objects.

From Smithsonian, American Kaleidoscope catalog:

She responded to the African understanding of art as a social practice embracing decoration, philosophy, religion, and medicine. Specifically, her memory of a nkisi nkondi "nail fetish" figure led her to Kongo "power objects" called minkisi.

The African idea of the Crossroads refers to the spiritual world meets everyday life and the unpredictability of fate.

Artist Statement

The common thread running through bodies of my work of the past several years is the continuing need for self-discovery, and the need to understand and make sense of human motives and the way we relate and respond to each other.

The process of working out the many questions I have about the human condition directly through my work has been both cathartic and empowering. The alter ego Fatima Mayfield, a fictitious herbalist/fortuneteller, is the vehicle that allows me to role play in order to confront the issues, whether it's romantic relationships, social ills, or financial woes, in a way that's open, creative and humorous.

As a visual artist, I choose to explore these ideas and concerns through the variety of media that's available to me. Originally trained as a painter, I came to realize that my creative vision was so expansive it would be confining for me to limit myself to creating in one medium for my entire career. When an idea hits me, I immediately decide which materials will best allow me to make that idea tangible. As a

result, my bodies of work have included paintings, drawings, prints, sculpture and photography. I see each one of my pieces as a fragment or installment in an ongoing narrative that's my contribution to telling the story of who we are as a society at this point in time.

Email to curator:

Detail about the little hand. That tiny hand is made of what was once a full-sized woman's leather glove that had gotten soaked with salted water after a snow. My friend tried to dry it on a radiator and it shrunk (which now solves the mystery for me of the actual shrunken heads that I saw at the Carnegie Museum when I was a child and saw the Nkisi Nkondi, as well). The glove is stuffed with all sorts of specially chosen herbs and other things for their symbolism, along with a message to the ancestors to convey to the spirits and the forces of the universe.

Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

Materials used (info from a Q&A with the Author):

There is a place I frequent that has all kinds of used architectural odds and ends and used appliances called Community Forklift. They also have bins of miscellaneous items like discarded electronics parts, wooden shapes, etc. The wooden piece in the shape of a ship was a found object in a woodbin. It was just the raw wood with a couple of pegs sticking out of it.

I added the wire grid work on top. The thick wire is actually some kind copper tubing that was once attached to a dishwasher that had belonged to the previous owner of this house. There was no dishwasher when I moved in but that tubing was lying in the space where it had been when I bought the house and for some reason I was compelled to hang on to it these past 15 years. The rest of the wire is from a spool of wire I have in my workroom.

I wanted the boat to allude to the slave trade, but it's also a metaphor for the ongoing journey and process of evolving that African Americans have been going through since our ancestors first arrived here. It's about navigation. How will we move through or around all of these trials and obstacles that we still face, even in the present?

The colors (Red and White) and the painted cross refer to Kongo cosmology. And in Yoruba and many other places throughout the diaspora, red black and white are the colors of the crossroads. It seems that at this time, not only are African Americans at a crossroads, but our entire country is at a crossroads in the dialogue about race and the piece is alluding to that as well.

The blackened light bulb also refers to the slave trade, when, literally, for innumerable Africans "the light went out." ... However, if you look just above the bulb there is a faint spot in the red field that's slightly lighter than the red around it. That lightness is like a faint glow from a light being cast from somewhere. The light isn't totally out and it's coming from somewhere.

I refer to it as "little" hand as a symbol of humility and all I have yet to learn. I am reaching toward the spirits of ancestors for guidance. It's not just about Africa, it's about ancestral spirits who gather at this moving crossroads and are with us wherever we may be.

(Washington, February 15, 2016)

From *Sculpture Magazine*, March 2017 (Mia Library) article *Formal Divination, Renee Stout* by A. M. Weaver: Esu/Elegba, who figures prominently in Stout's most recent work, may be her ruling deity. Elegba, as the ruler of the crossroads, functions as an intermediary between this reality and the spirit world. In *Crossroads Marker with Little Hand, Reaching* (2015), Elegba's colors and cross form an integral part of a ship-like configuration, possibly to connote the Middle Passage.

From: *Gathered Visions: Selected works by African American Women Artists* by Robert Hall: "Stout relies on a personal vision to create especially meaningful mixed media sculptures. Mystery, Spiritualism, death and whimsy are some of the many themes found in her work. Her "power images" are made with organic materials, historical items and objects associated with friends and family."

From: *In the Charmed Circle:* "My work had been influenced by African American 'Voodoo' and the African, Native American, and Mexican cultures. All of these cultures are very spiritual. In my work I explore the spiritual in my search for answers to my question is about the human condition."

Current Mia Label Information (optional)

Renée Stout transformed a found piece of wood into a boat, a symbol of the slave trade. At the same time, the boat is a vehicle for African symbols and beliefs that were carried, along with people, to America. The cross, for instance, is an important Kongo sign that refers to the crossroads between the world of the living and that of ancestors and spirits—hence the work's title. Stout finds inspiration in African cultures to create art that encourages self-examination, self-empowerment, and self-healing.

Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

Renée Stout, artist profile, Smithsonian American Art Museum:

<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artist/?id=6586>

Smithsonian, American Kaleidoscope catalog: Themes and perspectives in Recent Art, Exhibition Catalog from the National Museum of American Art, 1996 (chapter on Renee Stout pp 52-59):

<https://2.americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/kscope/kscope-noframe.html?/exhibitions/online/kscope/stoutbk2.html>

Renée Stout, National Museum of Women in the Arts: <https://nmwa.org/explore/artist-profiles/ren%C3%A9e-stout>

Renée Stout, Artist Statement: <http://www.reneestout.com/Statement.htm>

Paper files in Docent/Guide office – "Renee Stout answers questions about 'Crossroads with Little Hand, Reaching' dated Washington, Feb 15, 2016 (also posted on the IPE website, search for Renee Stout)

Wilson Web article: *In the Charmed Circle at the Crossroads*, by Monifa Love-Asante – International Review of African American Art, 23 no2 2010

Sculpture Magazine, March 2017 (Mia Library) article: *Formal Divination Renee Stout* by A. M. Weaver pp 48-53.

Gathered Visions: Selected works by African American Women Artists by Robert Hall. Published for the Anacostia Museum of the Smithsonian Institution by the Smithsonian Institute Press 1992 pg 25 Renee Stout Sculptor, Educator

Email from Renee Stout to Jan-Lodewijk in March 2017

On Wed, Mar 15, 2017 at 4:48 PM, Renee Stout <mme_ching@msn.com> wrote:

Hi Jan-Lodewijk,

How are you? I'm emailing because in my explanation of Crossroads Marker with Little Hand. Reaching, I forgot to tell you a detail about the little hand. That tiny hand is made of what was once a full-sized woman's leather glove that had gotten soaked with salted water after a snow. My friend tried to dry it on a radiator and it shrunk (which now solves the mystery for me of the actual shrunken heads that I saw at the Carnegie Museum when I was a child and saw the Nkisi Nkondi, as well). Anyway, she thought it was hilarious and sent it to me, knowing that it would be something I would use in my work. Of course you know by now that most of my work has its secrets. The glove is stuffed with all sorts of specially chosen herbs and other things for their symbolism, along with a message to the ancestors. I can't remember the specifics as I don't take notes as I'm assembling things like that while I'm working as I'm too busy focusing on content and intent and what I hope to convey to the spirits and the forces of the universe. Just wanted to let you know that, so that if you or any docent ever speaks on that piece, you will know that detail. Hope all is well!

Best, Renée

VIDEO: Durades dialogues: Renée Stout & Hawona Sullivan Janzen:

<https://vimeo.com/album/2905962/video/148558545>