



Crossroads Marker with Little Hand, Reaching, 2015

Renée Stout, born 1958

Metal, glass, wood, pigments, other material

THE BLYTHE BRENDEN ENDOWMENT FOR ART ACQUISITION, 2016.2

Renée Stout –answers questions about “Crossroads Marker, with Little Hand Reaching”

- *The wooden board is a found object, which already had this shape. (Do we know what it was made for?)*

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. I found the wooden shape in one of those woodbins. It was just the raw wood with a couple of pegs sticking out of it, but I have no idea of its previous use or what it may have once been attached to.

It sat around my studio for a couple of years until I was doing the work for Wild World and realized that it was the shape of a boat and that I wanted to use it.

- *You added the wire grid to make a boat, which alludes, among other things, to the slave trade.*

Yes 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 its 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 of red and white and the painted cross refer to Kongo cosmology.*

Yes. 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."*

Yes, the blackened light bulb is a metaphor for the light having gone out during this terrible time in African and American history. 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.

- *The waving / reaching hand, finally, stands for you and your endeavors to reconnect with your roots in Africa.*

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

Additional Information:

On Wed, Mar 15, 2017 at 4:48 PM, Renee Stout 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 it's 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 t 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