

# Artist tries to shed light on Stonehenge mystery

Story: CORINNE ABATT  
Photos: STEPHEN CANTRELL

When Sylvia Murphy's one-woman show opens at DeVorzon Gallery in Los Angeles June 19, there will probably be as many scientists as artists and art buyers at the reception.

Ms. Murphy of Birmingham draws on ancient history, geometry and archeology for "STONE CIRCLES: Conceptual and Romantic Images."

The artist who was born in England and lived there until she was 8, said, "I re-interpret relationships of stones, lines and their properties within the universe through art."

WITHOUT TRYING TO EXPLAIN why, she said she has always been interested in the Pyramids of Egypt, the Mayan temples of Central America, Greek temples and Stonehenge, that mysterious assemblage of giant stones on the Salisbury Plain in England.

"Particularly, in this new show, the stone circles and megalith structures found in England, are the center of her focus. Working in a variety of media

and combinations of media, she has reproduced the stone circles to scale, done freehand renderings of them as well as semi-abstract impressions and interpretations.

She picked up a small watercolor of a circle of stones done on paper she made herself, "When I did these, holding it in my hand made me feel like I was holding an ancient map."

MAPS EXCITE HER. "I was a biology major at one time, then I wanted to be a topographer. Sometimes when I want to read in bed, I read maps."

She studied art at Wayne State University and in the early '70s received scholarships to study in Italy. All of her interests in the sciences and arts have come together in preparation for this new show.

"I have finally focused on everything that has meaning for me," she said.

Along with her paintings, drawings and graphics, she will have sculptures in the show and these, too, have a special relationship to the rocks. In fact, it may be that one of her metal sculptures will be the high impact piece of

the show — the key to what her intuition tells her.

For about 10 years now, Ms. Murphy has been repeating a variation of a trapezoid in the work, a quadrilateral having two parallel sides. In her earlier works it looked like the base part of a triangle with the cone section left off. In the sculpture, the trapezoid has become elongated.

This shape eventually was the basis for an eight-sided steel sculpture.

Each of the eight panels, connected into a solid circle at the top, is open at the sides. She has done this same form in several sizes. When it is placed over one of her stone circle drawings of the same scale, interesting things happen.

Ms. Murphy said of her sculpture, "It is a light piece that marks the path of the sun in its daily, seasonal and annual movement. I would like to see a large piece commissioned so a human could stand in the center, dwarfed by the sculpture, and feel what happens at the focal point of all the light rays, perhaps even energy rays."

When the eight-sided piece is placed over a scale drawing of the rock circles and two light sources are used, representing the sun and the moon, the threads of light which narrow openings allow in the center cross, bisect and at certain points become one.

Ms. Murphy said there has always been a question among those who have studied Stonehenge and the other rock circles as to the purpose of shallow pits on the outer fringes of the circle. Could these be the boundary markers for where the light beams ended when the sun and moon were in certain positions?

"IT IS THE interplay of these that is exciting," she said. "When the moon acts as a secondary natural light

source, the light of the sun and moon can intersect and the result is the heart of modern geometry."

In her scale drawings, Ms. Murphy has found that the stone circles, particularly one near Shropshire, line up to seemingly become a calculator for the universe.

Explaining that the original purpose of the stone arrangements still eludes researchers, she said some may have been for social purposes, others religious, others as calculators — or a possible combination of all three.

She added simply, "The stones mark things."

But that statement, in itself, is a clue to her fascination with them.

What did they mark? Who arranged them? What ritual went with the stone arrangement?

"The possibilities are incredible," she said, "I have a strange feeling that something is going to come from this work."

The artist has dedicated this show

about stones to her maternal grandmother who was born in Shropshire, England. "She is from the same town as Charles Darwin in Shropshire, Wales," Ms. Murphy said. "Somehow, I feel that my interests in pre-history and, to a certain degree, evolution into the future, has something to do with my heritage."

The transmission of energy, aside from traditionally recognized means, is another area of interest. She sometimes uses a grid pattern in her paintings with the circles of stones superimposed on the grid to give a feeling of an energy field.

"When I was in Verona (Italy), I saw structures that were so old, I think they absorbed energy from so many people and now were giving it back."

In the same way, when she finds herself in some of the massive contemporary concrete structures, she said she has the impression of being completely drained, as if the structure was sucking all her energy.

But, whether her energies are being drained or replenished, Ms. Murphy can say without any qualifications, "I think I'm in love at large with the world."

Although she has had some of her work at Lee Hoffman Gallery, this Los Angeles show is the first major art effort in quite a while.

Because she can easily move in several directions, Ms. Murphy often does. She was formerly editor and publisher of Michigan Art Journal, member of the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association program committee, co-founder of the Detroit Workshop of Fine Prints and initiator of the Michigan Artists Registry now housed at the Archives of American Art.

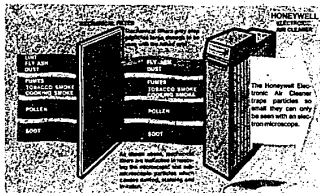
Her work has been exhibited at Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, San Jose Museum in California, the Saginaw Art Museum, the Detroit Institute of Art, the Scarab Club and the Women's Art Center Gallery.



Sylvia Murphy is intrigued by the rocks that mark man's history.

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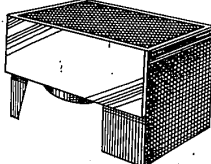


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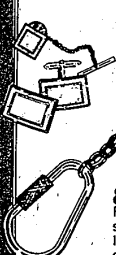


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