



## Toni Ross

### Artist Bio

Throughout her practice, Toni Ross has dealt with abstraction both in concept and in material. She has sought to locate the essence of form without surrendering the mindfulness, sensuality, and tactility that drives her visual thinking. In early works, Ross integrated the stoneware surface of cubes and vessels with their sculptural interiors. Though often unseen, her thoughts and memories were held in this internal space. Through parallel interests in words and the rhythm of language, she broadened her platform for creating stoneware sculpture. *April 13*, exhibited at the Parrish Art Museum's exhibition, "Artists Choose Artists," represented an initial explorations of time, continuance, and assemblage.

As Ross's practice evolved, the concept of internal/external developed in both context and execution. In her first site-responsive installation, *Permanent Transience*, 2016, she began to examine the cube in its relationship to ancient and vernacular architecture as well as its sense of permanence, natural stability, and geometric perfection. The intersection of containment and inwardness remained fundamental to her art as she embarked on *Sanctuary Entwined*, 2017, a large-scale installation created during the early turmoil of the U.S. immigration crisis. *Sanctuary* was very much on the artist's mind.

Creating large-scale works that respond to a specific environment or set of circumstances became central to Toni Ross's process. Returning to the cubic form in 2017, she created a site-responsive work through which she was able to integrate her interests in texture, thread binding, and patterns, situated within the majesty of the natural world. In *Sanctuary Entwined*, each of three cubes intersected one of three magnificent trees on the site. The idea of nesting was reiterated by the ephemeral nature of the cubes, in which hemp twine was woven around and through metal armatures. The project reflected aspects of the U.S. immigration crisis, which inspired Ross to create safe refuge and to provide both shelter and a place to commune with nature. It also ignited her sense of political outrage.

Later that year, Ross was invited to participate in "A Sense of Place," a group exhibition at Southampton Arts Center. Incensed by the disastrous political theater in America, Ross was compelled to address the subversion of our constitution. In a work titled, *DEMOCRACY*, she created a 16-foot chalkboard on which was written hundreds of phrases and concepts relating to liberty or the lack of it. As the words accumulated, she began to erase whole areas of text, leaving only the pentimenti over which the word "DEMOCRACY" was inscribed in large block letters.

In 2018, Ross took part in an outdoor sculpture exhibit at the Berkshire Botanical Garden in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Seeking respite and a return to beauty, she engaged three different garden trees, addressing

each of them with 18-24K gold leaf to reflect and enhance their natural patterns, bark, and knots. The gilding process was extensive and meditative, providing a degree of intimacy for her that was deeply rewarding.

Just before the pandemic exploded in the U.S., Ross was awarded Yaddo's Patricia Highsmith-Plangman Residency, located in Saratoga Springs, NY. The invitation to focus exclusively on her practice and engage with other fellows in the evening - all incredible artists - would become a cherished experience. While there, she further explored her interests in language and the written word, in structure and composition, and in texture, tactility, and the gridded line. Drawn to fiber, textiles, and the implicit grid of the weaving process, on her return to her Wainscott studio she embarked on a developing interest in woven materials.

When the pandemic erupted, the world was largely speechless. Ross engaged in weaving, drawing, and multiple indoor, mostly solitary, activities. When invited to exhibit an outdoor public artwork for the show "Drive-By-Art," she was moved to confront the isolation, fear, and strangeness of this unprecedented new existence. *When*, a site-specific work, was installed along a long stretch of roadway in Wainscott, New York. It was her attempt to reconnect with the community from a safe distance while contemplating mortality, the endlessness of quarantine, and the collective despair we all shared. *When* consisted of 450 feet of metal folding chairs placed at 6-ft intervals along the east side of the road. Each chair was hand-stenciled with calendar dates beginning with the New York State lockdown on March 15. As the chairs accumulated the dates moved forward through March, April, and May, until the sense of fatigue was almost too much to bear. Then they began to read only "yesterday," "today," and "tomorrow." Eventually, the chairs were heaped in a chaotic pile at the final edge of the installation, as if they had collapsed in exhaustion.

Since then, the chair has found a place in Ross's practice, acting as an effective metaphor for the human condition. The political nature of the U.S. as well as the global fallout from COVID-19 aroused a tangential focus in her studio practice that has also been fueled by current events. Ross turned her fear for our country into several project-based installations. Through 2020 and into 2021, she was focused on pandemic case-studies released publicly in the form of state-by-state bar charts. Observing the astonishing rise and fall of Covid-19 case numbers, she created fifty abstract weavings - one for each state - paying homage to the year + of suffering, loss of life, and the hope for a brighter future.

In 2017, Ross began a series of panel discussions called "WOMEN ARTISTS: Reshaping the Conversation." The concept was met with tremendous enthusiasm from women and men alike. The project has helped to build a community of people that are galvanized by its content and the times in which we live.

Born and raised in New York City, Toni Ross attended Wesleyan University where she studied ceramics and the arts, graduating with a BA in Film Studies. She lives and works in Wainscott, NY.

## **Exhibition History**

### Solo Exhibitions

- 2017      Sanctuary Entwined, a site-responsive installation, LongHouse Reserve, East Hampton, NY
- 2016      The Presence of Absence, Toni Ross, Ricco Maresca Gallery, New York, NY,  
(catalog)
- Permanent Transience, Parrish Road Show, Marders, Bridgehampton, NY
- Toni Ross new sculpture, The Drawing Room, East Hampton, NY
- 2014      Toni Ross: La Mémoire Collective, Galerie Dutko, Paris, France
- Toni Ross: Contained. Unbound., The Drawing Room, East Hampton, NY
- 2013      Symbiosis, Hood College, Frederick, VA
- 2011      Toni Ross, Ricco Maresca Gallery, New York, NY
- Unearthed, ARC Fine Art, Fairfield, CT
- 2009      Touchstones, The Drawing Room, East Hampton, NY
- 2001      Shino Explorations, Celadon Gallery, Water Mill, NY