



ART REVIEW: Liz Sloan Works Create a Clockwork Fantasy at Quogue Gallery

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by Charles A. Riley II

East meets West in the beguiling sculpture, collages, paintings and wall reliefs by Liz Sloan currently on view in “[Liz Sloan: Ki Path](#)” at [Quogue Gallery](#). In addition to negotiating a bridge from American to Asian culture, the works on view manage to suffuse the cool machine aesthetic of Modernism with a human warmth, giving a personal touch to impersonal geometry and turning the bright white spaces of the Quogue Gallery into a giant clockwork fantasy with a Zen accent.

This kind of cultural and aesthetic synthesis is not easy. Sloan encompasses the ideal of bringing opposites together in bold, brassy wall reliefs such as *My Hinckley*, a freewheeling assemblage of disks in navy blue Plexiglass with the famous boatmaker’s red pinstripes and a hint of wood grain.



“My Hinckley” by Liz Sloan, 2016. Sinatra, Lucite, Paper, Ink,
38 x 38 inches. Courtesy of Quogue Gallery.

At its core, the work holds a surprise gesture, an expressive flourish of calligraphy, lightly brushed in blue. The loose, fluid gesture is the perfect contrapuntal response to the tight edges and sharp contrasts of marine engineering. While the artist acknowledges that she doesn’t actually own a Hinckley boat (yet), she is out on the water as often as possible while living in Southampton.

That central moment of brushwork is the metaphysical basis of the “*ki* path” of the show’s title. It draws on the active life spirit (*qi* in Chinese, *ki* in Japanese) that energizes the work with an elemental “breath” of animation. Summoning and directing the *Ki*, like controlling the tip of the calligraphy brush in part by controlling one’s breathing, is Sloan’s response to a recent trip to the Japanese cities of Kyoto and Nara.

The lure of Buddhism has brought her to a language that is shared by other artists, from [Brice Marden](#) to [Philip Glass](#). As she noted in a statement about the show, “My work aims to recreate kinetic energy; to move; to resonate. The diverse use of circles is meant to take the angularity out of life and to give one a visual of what Kinetic Kindness feels like. It’s the Elemental energy that’s within all of us.”

The classic intertwined disciplines of the “three perfections” of the scholar’s studio in Asian

tradition are painting, calligraphy and poetry. Sometimes asceticism is solitary, static and even bitter, an ethos of withdrawal and meditative emptying that was historically linked to exile in the lives of poets and artists who were banished from court and practiced monkish devotion to lives of simplicity.

For Sloan, the *ki* path combines the clean lines and quiet surfaces of asceticism with something else that is less sobering. It is the personal touch of the calligraphic flourish instead of the severe geometry of Minimalism that lies at the heart of the wall reliefs, framed in rectilinear white boxes within the wheels, reminders of the subjective release from the objective process of detachment that can be part of meditation.

In such works as *Roulette*, which seemed to beg for a surreptitious spin, Sloan humanizes the ascetic ideal behind Precisionism or Minimalism, giving the piece the movement and freehand biomorphic qualities that pure geometry lacks on its own. The tentative pencil traces three layers down into the work, the slender red lines and a brushy white passage at the top were welcome human traces that gave the work life.



“Roulette” by Liz Sloan. Dibond, Lucite, Gesso, Paper, 33 x 33 inches. Courtesy of Quogue Gallery.

As in the sculpture of [Isamu Noguchi](#), there is a respect in Sloan’s assembled parts for the interplay of *hsu* (the void) and *shi* (the real or solid) as defined by the positive and negative of the precisely cut forms and the gaps they open. Here the artist becomes an architect of positive and negative space.

Another technical aspect of the wall reliefs is the way that Sloan thinks through her compositions in three dimensions, drawing on her design experience in the service of constructed pictorial spaces. The components are found objects as well as shapes she has precisely cut from Lucite, aluminum, wood, cardboard and paper, yielding pieces that are not unlike the wall reliefs made by Frank Stella beginning in the 1980s. The intention is to create what the artist calls a “suspended” and constructed array of forms in tiers that build outward into the gallery space from the traditional picture plane.

“The needs of an artist far exceed what can be sold in an art store,” Sloan noted in her statement. “There are so many materials out there.” The multimedia choices pile up in *Pinwheel*. Here the artist combines Lucite, aluminum, oil pastel and paper. A painter and collage artist—many of her two-dimensional works are on view at the Quogue Gallery—she is clearly relishing her adventures in the storeroom of assemblage supplies.



"Pinwheel" by Liz Sloan, 2015. Aluminum, Lucite, Paper, Oil Pastel, 36 x 36 inches. Courtesy of Quogue Gallery.

Sloan, who lives in Southampton and New York, is originally from Syracuse. She majored in fine arts at Colgate University, and has spent many hours at the drafting table as a designer of interiors as well as jewelry. In addition, she has spent more than 35 years studying at the Art Students League under a master of collage, [Bruce Dorfman](#).

Her training supports the acrobatic balancing act of *Heisenburg*, a two-part work of modest scale that is the ideal introduction to the double-sided nature of her work. On the left, tight edges and clean lines celebrate the machine aesthetic, while on the right a brushy blue and white background loosens the perfectionist grip. The disks balance tangentially on a stick that crosses from one side of the work to the other. It can be read as a magician's wand or a painter's mahl stick, guiding the balancing act carefully and surely.



"Heisenburg" by Liz Sloan, 2015. Dibond, Acrylic, Lucite, Paper, 17 x 24 inches. Courtesy of Quogue Gallery.

Many of Sloan's circular reliefs reminded me of the still life paintings made by a trio of linked figures in Jazz Age France: [Le Corbusier](#), [Fernand Leger](#), and Leger's protégé and friend [Gerald Murphy](#), who also lived in East Hampton. In particular, *Roulette* and *Pinwheel* remind me of Murphy's large, square still life *Watch*, a vertiginous trip inside the inner workings of his father's pocket watch. It is now one of the highlights of the Dallas Museum's permanent collection and would mesh well with one of Sloan's circular works.

While Murphy used a marvelous grey along with gold for his still life, Sloan's palette of blues, whites—defined by black lines for graphic punch—and sparing red is closest to Corbusier. By outlining the white ellipses of *Inquiry* with a sleek black line, Sloan cunningly projects the form off the wall and into the space of the viewer. [Roy Lichtenstein](#) is another artist who knew that power of contrast as well.



"Inquiry" by Liz Sloan, 2016. Sinatra, Lucite, 42 x 32 inches. Courtesy of Quogue Gallery.

Sloan aims for even grander visual impact with her sculpture *Nuclear*, which hovers extraterrestrially in the gallery's front window—where it shifts color in an iridescent range as the sun moves—and with *Inkscape*, an illuminated relief that uses an LED-powered light box complete with dimmer. Firmly framed in the secure blue she favors, *Inkscape* presents the layered play of light and shadow that [Laszlo Moholy-Nagy](#), the Bauhaus master, created in his late masterworks using plexiglass, many of which have been on view at New York's Guggenheim Museum (reviewed [here](#)).

Quogue Gallery is planning to feature Sloan's work at the upcoming Scope Miami Beach 2016 art fair, November 29 to December 4, 2016, a vote of confidence in the artist that will place her under the bright lights of international exposure. Judging from the centered self-possession evident in the current exhibition at the gallery, she'll handle the pressure just fine.

BASIC FACTS: "Liz Sloan: Ki Path" is on view August 12 to September 29, 2016, at Quogue Gallery, 44 Quogue Street, Quogue, NY 11959. www.Quoguegallery.com

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