

## Undzere Mentshn: Lee Hutt

**L**EE HUTT IS FULLY IMMERSSED IN WHAT SHE CALLS CHAPTER TWO OF HER LIFE. This era began over a decade ago when she said farewell to chapter one – a career that evolved from social work in New York City to the creation, from scratch, of the Student Counseling Center at Mount Holyoke College to a busy solo family therapy practice based in the towns of Amherst and Holyoke, MA.

The chapter-in-progress concerns Hutt's life as an artist, mostly, as a sculptor. She believes the move from one chapter to the next signifies a natural progression and a deepening of her commitments. It also signifies grasping with both hands an opportunity to express talents that have lain fallow since childhood. Hutt's beloved father trained as an artist and graduated as a draftsman from The Cooper Union Art School in 1918. But because of workplace anti-Semitism, he was unable to support his family with his degree. Hutt recalls that as a child, "I colored a lot within the lines, but I always knew I could do the art, too." It just took a while.

Of the continuity between her two careers, Hutt reflects, "I have a lifelong interest in people. The materials I use in my work have changed. The subject matter has not."

For the practice of her second vocation, Hutt designed a state-of-the-art studio space in South Hadley, MA. She personally oversaw the transformation of a vacant cinderblock gas station that sits at the junction of a busy country road and a suburban street into a stunning multi-purpose space. The workshop/office/exhibition/storage was "an art project on its own."

In the elegant gallery, Hutt has assembled some of her figurative sculpture. A self-described "inveterate explorer of plastic materials," she works mostly in the traditional media of clay, plaster, and bronze – but sometimes also in cement. Nearly all her subjects are human, though there is an occasional fish or artichoke or abstract assemblage. In Hutt's gallery, the busts of men, women, and children in the classic frontal mode are displayed, on pedestals and on steel structures hanging on the walls. Others are more fancifully posed – there is, for example, a young boy, on his back, his head on a pillow, reading a book and female torso sprouting a floral spray. Clearly each of these works is a portrait, the result of the sculptor's probing into the essential nature of her subject.

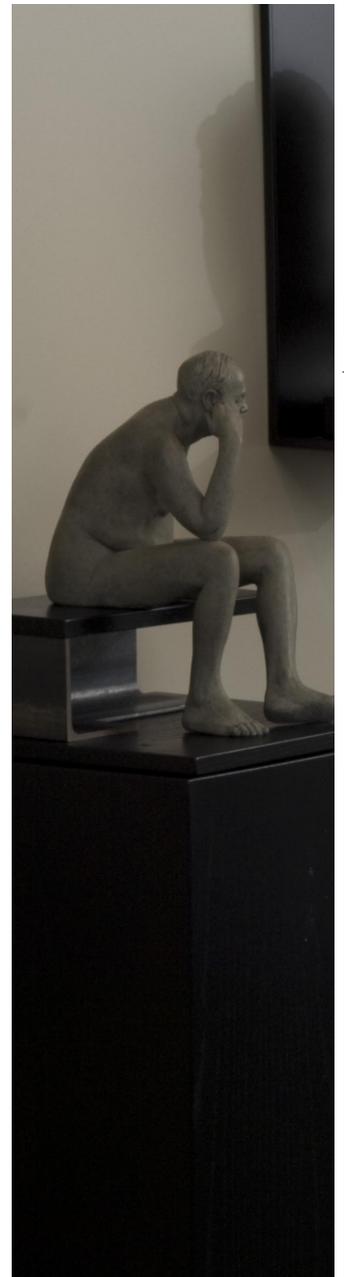


In a recent artist's statement Hutt said it this way: "Each person has a story.

I see a face or a figure and read that story. Can I capture that essence in clay? ... Will these sculptures communicate to the future something about who we are today? ... As artists, we record history. It is a privilege, filled with self-criticism, uncertainty, and occasional ecstasy."

A handful of Hutt's subjects are well-known, including the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, circa 1963. He is portrayed not once but twice by the artist: as an oddly exquisite small clay head (in life, some readers will remember, Khrushchev was solidly rotund), and, another view, in a large photograph of the very same sculpture mounted on the wall behind him. There is a cement bust of a young Aaron Lansky, with a pile of books under and to the side of him, his glasses in the foreground. A departed friend, the artist Gregory Gillespie, is cast in bronze bas-relief with his paintbrushes and a half-empty oil paint tube below. However, most of Hutt's subjects, are just folks.

Once she had decided on pursuing the artist's life, Hutt mastered the skills and techniques needed to work in several sculptural media. She welds, works waxes, chases metal, but does not pour – casting bronze, she said, is a job for a foundry. She has studied with



some of the best working figurative sculptors, including Bruno Lucchesi, Stanley Bleifeld, and Richard MacDonald. And although a relative newcomer to the field, Hutt has already enjoyed a significant measure of success. She is a professional member of The National Sculpture Society, director of sculpture of The Allied Artists Of America, is Listed in Who's Who In American Art, and shows regularly in national juried shows. She has garnered a string of awards from the National Sculpture Society, Pen and Brush Club, and the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club. Hutt has had four solo exhibitions and was featured in the May and June 2007 issues of *American Art Collector*. And at any time several of her pieces are circulating in galleries and shows across the country. Her web site is [www.leehutt.com](http://www.leehutt.com).

Hutt gives loving credit for her success to her husband Alfred Hutt, an ophthalmologist whose professional life brought her to Western Massachusetts in the first place. (The couple maintains an apartment in Manhattan to keep up



## BaymTsender

with family, opera, and the art scene.) “My best critic,” Lee calls her husband, who is, like her, a gifted photographer. Of her good fortune, she notes, “I am free to choose any subject that interests me. And I do. Although, I’m pretty isolated here, I am not overly influenced by the New York art scene, and my art is about the stories of the people who people my life.”

The interest in stories stems from Hutt’s Brooklyn childhood, when she imbibed the family history of forced migration, a generation before, from Russia to

*lakht.*” Other admonitions with Yiddish antecedents in Hutt’s childhood household: “You should be as good as you look!” and “It’s your America!” .

It was not until decades later when, at Aaron Lanksy’s invitation, Hutt joined the board of directors of the National Yiddish Book Center and was introduced to modern Yiddish literature, that she understood the terrible realities of the Russian life her forebears had fled. The books, now in keeping at the Book Center, were the vehicles of her understanding.



America. “The stories were about struggle, poverty, and separation,” Hutt recalls. “They were also about warmth and pride – and relief that those hard times were behind them.” These were her first ethics lessons, and they provided the seeds that led eventually to a career in social work and the ethics used in doing psychotherapy. A Russian grandmother who spoke only Yiddish lived with her family, but the young girl was not taught the language. Hutt says, “At a certain point, I was angry that they did not emphasize our Jewishness.”

Hutt’s mother, like most of her generation, was intent on full assimilation into American society. “My mother spoke to me in sayings or proverbs. I realized as an adult that they were translations from Yiddish!” For example, “Man plans and God laughs” is the English version of the Yiddish “*Me trakht un Got*

“I read Isaac Babel and I knew my family history,” she says. “I wasn’t taught Yiddish because they wanted to protect me from what they had escaped.” Her parents, she realized, were like Sholem Aleichem’s Tevye: “They did not know what was best for their daughter, to marry or go to school. I had thought our conflicts were unique. It was very comforting for me finally to realize how we fit into Jewish history.”

Since joining the Book Center’s board of directors, Hutt has watched, with great pleasure, “the evolution of this marvelous place.” She finds her fellow board members unusually “accomplished, passionate, willing to debate hard issues, willing to lend their abilities and resources” to the tasks at hand. Hutt ranks her involvement with the Book Center as “the second best part of chapter two.”

