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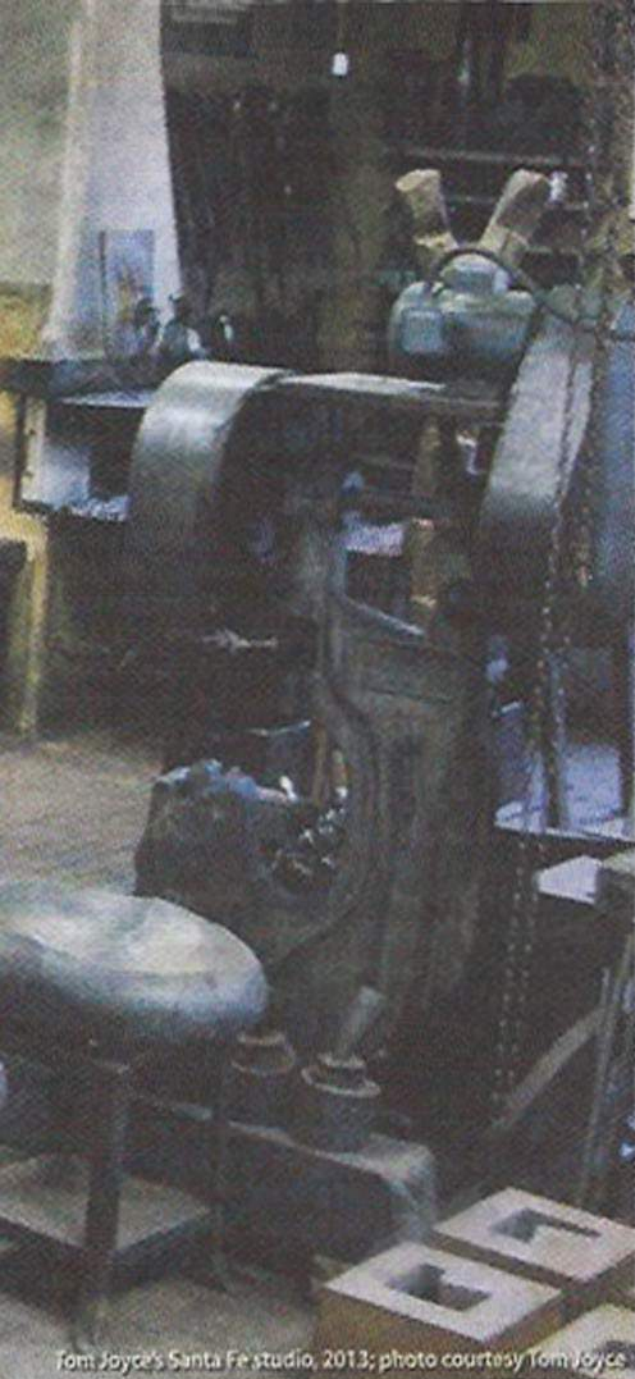
TOM JOYCE
AT COA



IF HE HAD A

HAMMER

ARTIST TOM JOYCE



Tom Joyce's Santa Fe studio, 2013; photo courtesy Tom Joyce

scaled up or down from the size of the original, but the central idea of the work is a potent one for him. "I kind of owe my life to a hammer. When that tool was handed to me at a critical age, it opened the doors to a world much wider than I could have imagined. The hammer is emblematic of a process that leads me toward processes that have nothing to do with hammers but it opens this dialogue, and the sort of hand knowledge of how to work with these tools expands to an understanding of how to work with any material."

The basis of the *Thicket II* project is "a simple gesture," he said. "It's made up of 23 components, the number of chromosome pairs in the human genome." The artist divided the hammer-head nuclei among six constellations up to 18 feet tall and composed asymmetrically along both sides of the Tank Garage Gallery entrance and also climbing the wall of the building. This is a much larger version of his first *Thicket* installation, a 2015 commission for the Mint Museum in Charlotte. Asked about the computer modeling that was required for this piece, Joyce said, "It's a little bit like any inventor. There are certain

things that one can intuit without actually going through the steps and you take leaps from one point to another. The goal was to fall off the cliff, to let go of my usual method of manufacture where I have everything laid out and I know precisely where I'm going. This required a construction method that was a leap of faith."

Joyce was born in Oklahoma and moved in 1974 to El Rito, where he trained in blacksmithing. "I've made art as long as I've been a blacksmith," he said. "My career as an artist has run a parallel path alongside my training as a blacksmith. All along, I've veered toward making work that tends to catapult me away from any sense of complacency, to move out into the world where a subtle anxiety of the unknown is the comfort zone I seek." He established his Santa Fe studio in 1977 and also maintains a studio in Brussels, Belgium. He has exhibited internationally since 1981 and was awarded a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 2003. Examples of Joyce's work reside

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Berg XIX in process, Spring Grove, Illinois, foundry; courtesy Joyce

Thicket II, an installation piece by Tom Joyce, is arguably the most dynamic of more than 30 works in the exhibit *Everything at Hand*, opening Friday, July 28, at the Center for Contemporary Arts. At first glance, *Thicket II* resembles a giant three-dimensional asterisk or a frozen moment in an explosion, and the reality of the work's materials and intention are as intriguing as its appearance. There are 23 "nucleus" clusters, each one a tightly grouped cast-iron assemblage of modeled hammer heads with long stainless-steel rods sprouting from their "handle" orifices. The softly gleaming silver rods contrast with the dark gray nuclei, and when multiple clusters are combined, the result is a fascinating and impenetrable tangle.

"I took the hammer that I use the most in the shop and made a CT scan of it at the hospital [Christus St. Vincent Regional Medical Center], then I imported it into a program to align it in such a way that the rods would pass by one another without conflict," Joyce said. Many of the hammer-head castings were



Thicket II (detail), showing forged nuclei and stainless-steel rods; courtesy Joyce



One of the Aureole pieces

Tom Joyce, continued from Page 41

in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian Institution's Renwick Gallery and the Yale University Art Gallery, among others.

The artist is known for coaxing a handmade quality out of his dense works in forged and cast iron, and for working with the byproducts of large-scale manufacturing — in fact, when he harvests iron during a factory operation, he speaks of it as the “offspring” of the “parent” material and use. “The primary reason I use this material is its historical relevance. It’s seeking out specific material that has had a former life that somehow can be addressed in the new work. That’s why it’s critical to be present at the factory, because I’m watching objects being forged for the very first time. They’re testing the limits of how to arrive at a certain complex shape using a forged methodology that you would never imagine could be made that way. I know that that object is employed inside a defense or space application or whatever and the part I’ve retrieved is still tied metaphorically to that parent.”

The seven sculptures of his 2014 *Two to One* installation at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City pose an interesting contrast in terms of the relationship with their “parents.” Joyce and the director of the museum on busy Columbus Circle decided it would be nice to provide a place for people to pause, to slow down. “I knew the sculptures wanted to be fairly short and that they’d be inviting to sit on. But when you’re sitting there, in a relative calm in the midst of all that activity, each one of those objects was actually made from something that comes from a machine that is extremely noisy or dangerous or violent. It’s paused in this moment, but its parent is something that is quite dramatic.” The pieces, he said, “are descendants of parts forged for excavating equipment that move mountains, ore-crushing machines that chew up rocks the size of SUVs, and paper-mill shafts that spin around the clock at deafening velocities.”

TOM JOYCE IS KNOWN FOR COAXING A HANDMADE QUALITY OUT OF HIS DENSE WORKS IN FORGED AND CAST IRON, AND FOR WORKING WITH THE BYPRODUCTS OF LARGE-SCALE MANUFACTURING.

Iron and steel are this artist's usual materials of choice, but *Tom Joyce: Everything at Hand* also includes 3-D-printed translucent materials, video, and photography. His psychedelically colorful *Well* series of 40- by 40-inch prints are based on photographs he took of the ends of 40,000-pound ingots at the forge. The show has a total of 34 works, including forged and cast-iron sculptures that range from the 14-inch *Divided III* to the nine-foot-tall *Stack VI*; lithographs and charred drawings; *Tenet*, a hanging mixed-media installation of tools and artifacts involved in the forging process; a video titled *Core Value*; and *Untitled*, a 3-D tools installation.

Untitled is an artistic reflection of a sampling of the hundreds of steel tools hanging on the walls of Joyce's shop. “We scanned a lot of these tools that were made for specific jobs, tools I will never need again,” he said

in early July. "We're 3-D-printing models of them on translucent material and I'll use pigments and we'll create a dark room and the tools will be illuminated as if they're X-rays. There will be about 250 of them."

The exhibit is wide-ranging, but for the most part it's a continuation of the work Joyce does with two factories: the Kohler factory in Wisconsin for his cast-iron pieces and a forging facility in Spring Grove, Illinois, that he's had access to for nearly 15 years. "It's really a gift that they allow me to come in. They don't work



Joyce builds patina, spraying *Thicket II* nuclei

with any other artists; it's an industrial forge and the processes they're using are really cutting-edge." Joyce keeps up on the industry via contacts with metallurgists and materials specialists, but he's often looking for different things than the factories are. "I think about how to take what is problematic in industry, the kinds of things that happen to steel that are still a natural part of their process but are ones that they try to avoid, and then to exploit them in different ways to find some inherent nature of the material."

Joyce said the industry works with more than 700 alloys, but iron itself has "enough peculiar qualities" to keep him busy and fascinated, especially discovering new features of its molecular structure that can be exposed through the work. "In the casting, because in the molten state iron moves as freely as water, it's how to use that very liquid state to realize forms that are more complex than I could ever forge. And in the forging realm, it's to try to find inherent patterns inside the material itself and express them in different ways. When you see my work, you know that something else has happened. It's not the kind of material that you would expect to perform the way that it is, and that's only happening because I've taken it to these extreme states and caused it to do things that it shouldn't do in industry but are pretty expressive."

An obvious example in *Everything at Hand* is the deeply crackled *Aureole*. "We heat it up to 2,500 degrees and then quench it in a solution that allows it to suddenly compress and every time it expands and contracts, it shows more of the grain." Another is *Fissure*, a stainless-steel piece that was originally five feet in diameter. "It was a big bar that was clogged down, squared up, and forged fast and cold so that it started to delaminate, and once that begins it can't stop, so the cracks will migrate and express the grain

structure." The show has six reddish *Surge* pieces, high-carbon steel and related to a part used in agricultural food processing. *Bloom*, a similarly richly rusty work, is named for a term in smelting, the process of heating ore to extract iron. "Bloom is the first phase in smelting, when ore is melted in the furnace until it becomes a spongelike mass, and that mass is forged into bars for use." Six *Two to One* pieces are installed outside the CCA building, a symbolic echo of the Columbus Circle grouping.



First *Thicket* piece, Mint Museum, Charlotte, North Carolina, courtesy Joyce

Three *Aureole* pieces, installed both inside the Tank Garage and in the new CCA sculpture garden, are more than 6 feet high and weigh up to 6,050 pounds. The whimsically wrinkled *Berg XV* sculpture is 16,800 pounds of forged high-carbon steel that appears to have just floated down to rest for a moment. And the looming, forged stainless-steel *Stack VI* weighs 42,500 pounds. Joyce achieves some remarkably un-ironlike textures in these works. For instance, the top of *Fissure* looks like swelled and cracked dough, *Stack* and *Berg* could easily be slumpy and soft, and *Surge* has sensuous folds like human skin.

During our visit on a recent July afternoon, Joyce spent some time hand-spraying *Thicket II*'s 23 hammer-head clusters and two *Surge* pieces, part of a patina-nurturing process that involves dozens of moistenings. Then he walked down to an area where associates were performing meticulous cleanup work on *Bloom*, *Aureole*, and other forms. "Usually I give myself a year or two to put together a major exhibition like this, so we've just been kind of wacky, running around and doing things all over the place," he said. "This will be the largest grouping of objects ever put together in any exhibition I've had. We will be bringing over 200,000 pounds of steel. It won't seem that it's big, but it is heavy." ◀

details

- ▼ Tom Joyce: *Everything at Hand*; through December
- ▼ Opening reception 6 p.m. Friday, July 28
- ▼ Exhibition walk-through with the artist 2 pm. Saturday, July 29
- ▼ Center for Contemporary Arts, 1050 Old Pecos Trail, 505-982-1338
- ▼ Reception and walk-through no charge; thereafter \$5 suggested donation; visit www.ccasantafe.org or call 505-982-1338 for information about related events



Berg XVII; courtesy Joyce



Stack VI; photo Daniel Barsotti