

Tom Joyce: *Everything at Hand*

Center for Contemporary Arts, Santa Fe

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“The way up and the way down are the same...”
—James Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld*

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO CONVEY THE MONUMENTAL QUALITY PRESENT IN TOM JOYCE'S

exhibition. The scale of some of his forged iron and steel pieces is something to consider along with the works' refined Platonic sense of form. In addition, there are the physical demands of weight and placement. Regarding just one piece in CCA's Sculpture Garden, *Stack VI* is an imposing column of irregularly shaped cubes that is nine feet high and weighs forty-five thousand pounds. *Everything at Hand* encompasses so much actual weight which is in equal proportion to the virtual weight of Joyce's evolving visions of sculptures, photographs, mixed-media installations, large drawings, and video. All the work came into being through processes often difficult to comprehend in their entirety, but, nonetheless, the mythic alchemy of transformation by fire lies at the root of Joyce's career that began with him as a blacksmith in El Rito several decades ago.

Joyce's large sculptures possess gravitas in spades; indeed the very idea of gravity walks hand-in-hand with a viewer looking at all the work, yet, curiously enough, the artist has made his primeval processes seem effortless. The sheer physical effort involved in producing this work, now done in collaboration with others, is hidden in the end results, in physical relationships established between a form and its placement—a sculpture in a bed of gravel next to a tree, for example, or a dark and brooding work

seamlessly positioned into a corner of the gallery as if it had actually been born there, as in *Lignifact I*.

Datum I and *Datum II* are forged stainless steel discs, one concave and one convex, and they are in dialogue with each other on two separate but facing walls. One is seventy-five inches in diameter and the other is eighty, and although they weigh eleven thousand pounds combined, they don't seem ponderous or overbearing. On the contrary, one feels as if the two discs could be easily plucked off the wall and be made to fit together like two severed pieces of an original whole. In contrast to the large sculptures of iron and steel, there is the fascinating installation *Tenet*, made up of 185 translucent, 3-D printed tools, each hanging by a nearly invisible filament in a ghost-like cloud of luminous forms, none more than a foot long. The pieces look like ancient Cycladic figures from an early pre-Greek civilization that once existed in the Aegean Sea.

One can't help but be drawn to the mythic dimensions of Joyce's practice. Think of Hephaestus, the Greek god of blacksmiths and sculptors, symbolized by an anvil, a hammer, and a pair of tongs. Hephaestus was an archetype of the dark subterranean creative forces needed to bring art into the world in a trial by fire. And nowhere is the mythic quality of Joyce's work

more evident than in the astonishing installation *Tc* (*Curie Point*), incorporating such things as used and obsolete tools, sketches, fixtures, metal signs, benches, a furnace, a forge with dead coals in the grate—all hanging upside down in a gravity-defying homage to the deeply strange, chthonic world of artistic process, a metaphorical state of psychological inversion. In this dimly lit room of objects hanging from the ceiling, Joyce has given us a kind of passport into a mysterious underworld of formative inspiration, where in order to go down into this dark and pressurized elemental world, one has to release all nonessential baggage and float upwards.

Joyce's magnificent obsession of materializing his visions of a weightless weight isn't easy to describe. You have to walk through the doorway of *Tc* (*Curie Point*) and into that impossibly stunning space—which is also a little spooky—and sense the artist's balancing act between an elemental love of fire and danger and the desire for impossibly elegant forms that appear to have supernaturally sprung from the head of Zeus.

—Diane Armitage

Tom Joyce: Everything At Hand, installation view. Left: Tom Joyce, *Datum II*, 2017, forged stainless steel, 80 x 80 x 4.25 in. Right: Tom Joyce, *Datum I*, 2017, forged stainless steel, 75 x 75 x 4 in. Background: Tom Joyce, *Decalescence*, 2017, forged stainless steel, 2 of 4 pieces in view, dimensions variable. Photo copyright Daniel Barsotti.

