

Blacksmith's Work Speaks With Soft and Subtle Voice

■ *Tom Joyce's sculpture, drawings on display at Evo Gallery*

Play with fire, and you get burned. That's for the vast majority of us. Blacksmith-artist Tom Joyce, however, has been playing with fire with Promethean skill since he learned to work iron in a blacksmith shop in El Rito, New Mexico at the age of 14. Although suffering his share of burns, he has since forged a successful 30-year career making sculpture, vessels and architectural ironwork, culminating, for now, at least, in a MacArthur Foundation "genius" fellowship bestowed upon him in 2003.

At Joyce's current exhibition, "Sotto Voce," of "charred drawings" on the wall and rust-hued hunks of forged iron on the floor, a disconcerting, devilish whiff of sulfur suffuses the otherwise heavenly environs of the Evo Gallery. The aroma of carbonized matter

About Art



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For the Journal

seems to emanate from the drawings on particle board "branded" by intensely heated rings of steel pressed upon the wood. Titled "Penumbra," the drawings of single and often interlocking rings are handsome, geometric abstractions in a minimalist mode that bring to mind the work of noted Albuquerque artist and teacher Garo Antresian. They do actually glow with a light outer shadow surrounding the dark, mottled inner ring, and they summon a nebulous condition somewhere between complete lightness and complete darkness as in an eclipse.

The rust-colored chunks of floor sculpture are modest-sized, no more than two and a half feet in any one direction, and they come in two distinct fashions. Joyce's "Berg" series offers irregular, boulder-like rectangles fused together as if by a natural, organic geological process. "Berg" is short for "iceberg," I guess, but these are bergs of solid, rock-like weight and wedded mass rather than solid ice. In a slight variation several "bergs" are blackened and have been pieced together to become a "bench" series, suitable for sitting upon.

The series "Bloom" consists of several rusty looking, forged iron, vertical "posts" with softly arched heads grouped together like a band of bound bread loaves, for want of a better description.

An illuminating article on Joyce's work by the estimable critic Ellen Berkovitch, in the Sunday New York Times ("Swords Into Plowshares," August 14, 2005) reveals that all of the sculptural works in the exhibition

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COURTESY EVO GALLERY

Charred drawings and rust-hued hunks of forged iron are part of "Sotto Voce," Tom Joyce's current exhibition at Evo Gallery.

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COURTESY PHOTO BY KATE JOYCE

Tom Joyce's skill with fire has helped him forge a successful 30-year career making sculpture, vessels and architectural ironwork.

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have been forged from discarded metal scrap from the Scot Forge factory in Spring Grove, Ill., makers of machinery and weapons parts, collected by Joyce from April to July this year.

It's the weapons parts that Joyce has foremost in his mind during this time of war, however, as well as the role that ironworkers and blacksmiths like him have historically played in the development and innovation of weapons. Joyce, in a quietly voiced (*sotto voce*) almost unheard statement and confession, is embarked on a kind of alchemical, shamanistic act of renunciation and transformation with these pieces. The impulse is one that

If you go

WHAT: "Sotto Voce," sculpture and drawings by Tom Joyce

WHEN: Through September 10

WHERE: Evo Gallery, 725 Canyon Road, Santa Fe, 982-4610

is as ancient as early cave drawings and the first weapons themselves, and one dearly hopes for the best as Joyce offers, in the forms of these steel masses, his soft prayers for peace and his "j'accuse" to the war and weapons-makers.

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