

# JOURNAL

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North

EDITION

SANTA FE \* ESPAÑOLA \* LOS ALAMOS \* LAS VEGAS \* TAOS \* RATON

## The Arts

JOURNAL NORTH THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1998 6

# HEAVY METAL TRANSFORMED

*Artist Embodies Link Between  
Hands-On Craft, Refined Aesthetics*

**V**elvety, draped, squiggly. What do these words describe? In the case of Tom Joyce, these unlikely words are aspects of his current work of steel and iron at the LewAllen Contemporary gallery. Heavy metal. Transformed.

Joyce is an acknowledged master of his medium. He can move molten metal and marry it to other materials like no one else. Joyce is a restless, persistent experimenter and, in the lexicon of his oeuvre, the strongest works here are the oldest and the newest.

This current exhibition is a mix of pieces that are refinements of his ongoing aesthetic concerns and new work that feels wholly fresh and unexpected. His square bowls are a form he perfected in the past, and the wall pieces of plaster and found objects are more recent surprises. The bowls are refined objects of exquisite repose, and the wall pieces are playful tablets of animated metal silhouetted in oxidized plaster.

Until now, Joyce's best work has always seemed to be his quietest, like the square bowls. Each is titled simply "Square Bowl," a modest moniker that is misleading in the way that calling a lovely poem a "text" is.

These bowls are utterly poised in their proportions, in the subtle satiny sheen of their surfaces, and in their delicate relationships. They are extended deliberations on the very nature of three-dimensionality. They invite the viewer to consider such basic 3-D vocabulary as the center and the

### About Art



**MALIN  
WILSON-POWELL**  
For the Journal

margin, solidity and fragility, the curved edge and the straight line, the lips and the body, the supine top and the upright pedestal.

Joyce's inlaid square bowls are exhibited in the window of the LewAllen gallery. This is art work that can survive direct sun and the human touch. Indeed, the square bowls valorize the handmade by surrounding old pieces of iron in a broad border of forged mild steel. The only true square here is the silvery tile of old iron in the middle of each bowl. A wider and darker border of steel is not square, but rounded, upturned, lipped, pocked.

The central "pictures" are each distinctive and strike a different chord: flattened barbed wire in rippling diagonal streamers, 2-part tiles suggesting geologic sedimentation and/or topographic elevations, and the folded grain of "Damascus" or moiré-patterned steel. Each of these framed pictures is presented and raised on a graceful base.

Obviously Joyce's work merits

prolonged scrutiny. And the bowls are just the beginning. For those who have followed Joyce's ongoing interests, the exhibition also includes combinations of steel and burnt books. How does he do it? Four free standing sculptures titled "Printer's Chase" are thick rusty steel frames holding stacks of charred books. These solid but disparate materials are then grooved, and seared, and subtracted from by fire.

There are also two lovely burnt-book wall pieces, both titled "Platen." Like the free-standing sculptures, these refer to physical supports used in the printing process. The chase is the metal frame into which pages are fastened for printing, and the platen is the flat part of the printing press that presses the paper against the type.

In his book burning, Joyce has subverted the order of the process. On each "Platen," seven typed and printed pages have been pressed and burnt away on the long strip of upright steel. With intense heat, the pages and most of the words have been incinerated, obliterated. What remains are traces, ooze, encrustations. If you want to "read" it, the message is in the wordless, physical transmutation of the material.

Another successful wall piece is called "Sixteen Part Wall Piece — Rust/Fold," a grid of orange squares with a subtracted corner and an added flap. This simple looking piece exploits the large effects of small perturbations in a grid. It uses the space in between



**"RIO GRANDE TABLETS":** These "pictures" made of mild steel, forged refuse and plaster by Tom Joyce can be seen at the LewAllen Contemporary gallery through Nov. 28.

to great effect, and the color is lovely and velvety.

The exhibition culminates with the plaster and iron wall pieces, each titled "Rio Grande Tablet." Developed during his work on a gate for the Albuquerque Museum sculpture garden, these tablets use scavenged iron found along the Rio Grande — wrenches, pipe, wire, hand wrought nails. These are a few of the recognizable iron items that have been heated, smooched and sometimes folded into wet plaster. Rust migrates away from the metal into the plaster, creating mottled patches, blooms and halos.

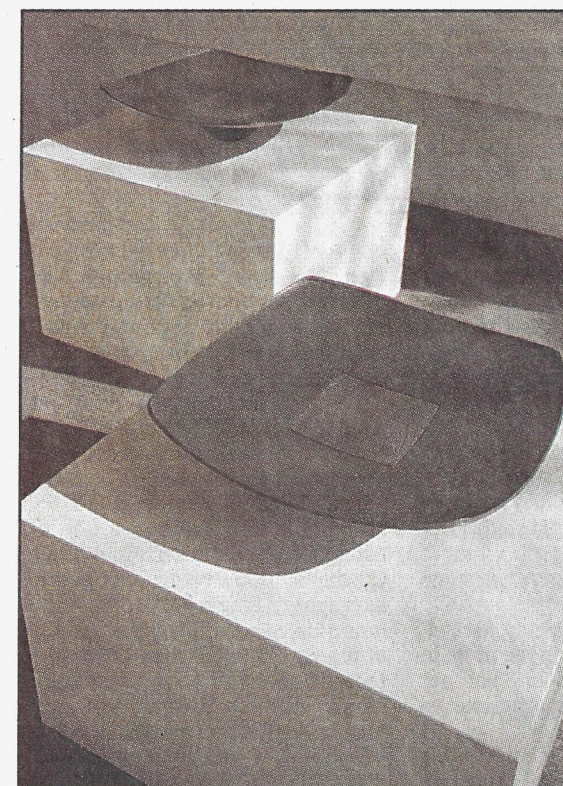
These solid, dense little panels are mostly vertical and their magic is that although made of heavy materials, they are bright, light and animated. These objects feel like frozen moments. Here the recycled is celebrated, and its inventive treatment can hardly be characterized as a re-use. Rather, banal industrial detritus is now part of something fresh and of the first order.

Joyce's studio is also a blacksmith shop where he and his colleagues still produce architectural detailing. He embodies the link in our community between hands-on craft and refined aesthetics. For good cause, Joyce has been recognized throughout the world and received major commissions in Washington, D.C., Phoenix, Albuquerque and Ohio. When will he do a major public piece for Santa Fe? Soon, I hope.

### "Tom Joyce" exhibition

**WHEN:** 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.  
Monday through Saturday through Nov. 28

**WHERE:** LewAllen Contemporary,  
129 West Palace Ave., 988-8997



**"SQUARE BOWLS":** These objects made of forged mild steel and iron by Tom Joyce can be seen at the LewAllen Contemporary gallery.

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