

## ARTS AND CULTURE



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## REUSE, RECYCLE, RE-JOYCE

BY ZANE FISCHER  
culture@sfreporter.com

If Tom Joyce were a super hero, what would his name be? Having pushed a craft-centric brand of metalworking into a meaningful and important layer of the art stratosphere, Joyce, humble as when he worked in the basement of Hills Gallery decades ago, has in fact achieved a kind of supra-normal, otherworldly power that is most commonly recog-

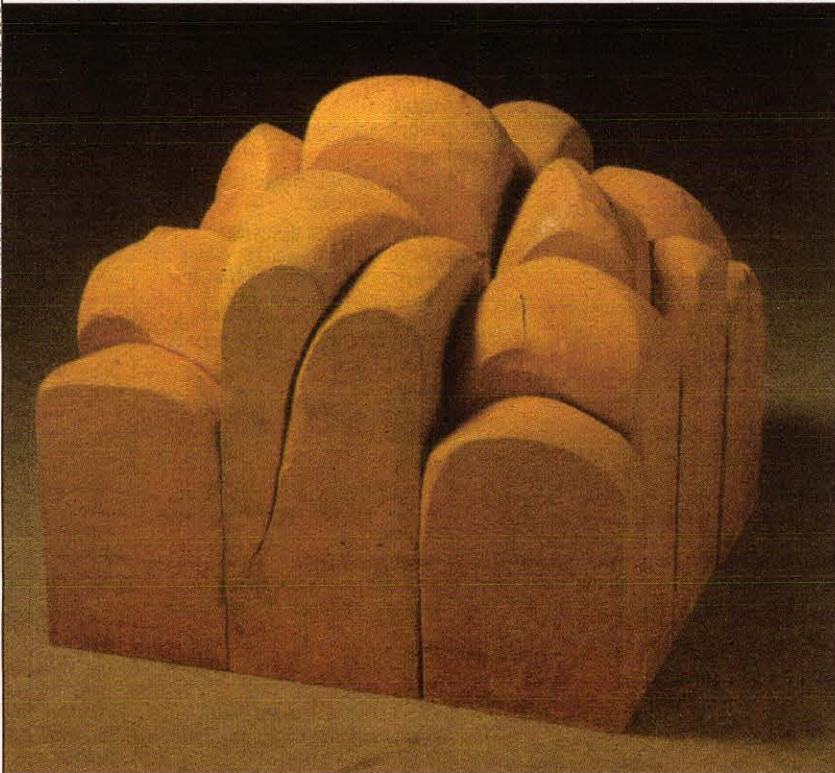
earth erupted from the planet's crust, or galactic building blocks delivered from the sky, each object demands reverence—finding such stuff in an art gallery is emotional and powerful, finding these things in the wilds of the world, unexplained, would be profound, something between a cause to worship and an alien encounter.

The *Bergs*, more obviously formed with heavy tools (communicating with workers accustomed to production runs of artillery components or space shuttle

parts, Joyce used clay maquettes to show what he wanted to accomplish, something that had to be done quickly as the clay pooled into formlessness in the constant 130 degree temperature of the forge), have a similarly intense presence.

The fact that each of these sculptures, weighing as much as 4,000 pounds, is supported in the gallery's basement with ceiling jacks, lends to the elemental effect—they have sprouted iron roots, tendrils that stretch, like umbilical feeders toward the molten core of the earth, the final forge, the source.

For all that, they would be better with more space around them. Each piece, set in place, viscerally emanates and, as waves of sound or water cancel each other out, so too is the force of each piece diminished by being packed together

PHOTO: HERB LOTZ  
TOM JOYCE, "BLOOM, III" 2005

Tom Joyce's latest work packs a punch, weighs a ton and needs some room.

nized with capes, cowls and comic book adulation. Blacksmith Boy feels too youthful and sidekick-ish. If Green Lantern qualifies, something like Glowing Forge could work as well, but it rings derivative. Iron Man, obviously, is already taken. Joyce was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship in 2003, but Genius Guy doesn't really get to the heart of what he does. Putting aside alter egos for a moment though, what Joyce does do is partly and spectacularly, if a touch heavily, on display at Evo Gallery (725 Canyon Road, 982-4610) through Sept. 10.

The gallery is a relatively intimate one which has managed to house some works of both impressive size and presence in the past, but this time it's too small. Or, more to the point, there is just too much work inside the space. Joyce has several different kinds of forms on display, all created during a 2 1/2 month stint at the super industrial foundry Scot Forge in Illinois, the floor of the main gallery being occupied primarily by two series, *Blooms* and *Bergs*. The *Blooms* are upended and interlocked blocks of forged iron, heat-riddled loaves that fit together in a square footprint and rise into shapely, rounded tops at staggered elevations, like a dense cityscape or a growth of crystals. The presence of each piece is confounding. They are beautiful, yes; they are impressive in terms of cunning deployment of heavy industrial tools to create elegant sculpture, yes; they ooze an ancient anatomy in their overlapping and extruded form, yes; but still they are more. Like chunks of intelligent

too tightly. This, at the gallery, is a function of marketplace more than aesthetic, and an effective one to judge from the swarm of red dots indicating sales, but these pieces demand—and deserve—more room to make waves and allow the intention they were crafted with to find its rightful place in the seismic-social ripple.

As much as each work is geological, archaeological and magical, Joyce's efforts routinely encapsulate a social-historical component as well, and the work on view—made almost exclusively from discarded scrap including guns, knives, refrigerators, shopping carts, real estate signs and a great deal of unknown remnants and curious alloys of heavy industry—continues his signature recycling and deliberate insertion of specific materials to infuse certain meaning. This is not work to be read about or to see pictures of—it requires a visit, a touch, a sense of personal scale, a slow unravelling of process and practice to uncover the roots, the secret identity of not only each individual piece, but of the effort behind creating with such consistent intention. Despite the revelatory documentation of Joyce working—in the form of several stunning photographs by his daughter, Kate Joyce—he remains elusive, but perhaps the most impressive kind of artist, one whose all-powerful, superhero guise remains secret and unnameable, while his daily identity as Tom, the mortal and mild-mannered blacksmith, keeps defying the odds to fill the world with form, function and beauty of uncanny integrity.