

Tom Joyce

the layered strength—and meaning—of the celebrated blacksmith’s work

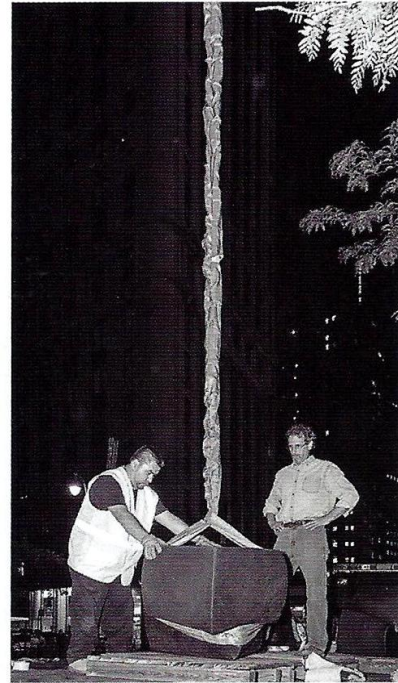
by Gussie Fauntleroy

THE WONDROUS THING about iron, notes Tom Joyce, is that it almost never gets thrown away. And each time iron is forged and reused, something of the material’s previous life is literally folded inside the new. It’s what Joyce calls the “ferrous DNA” of iron, and it adds layers of often-hidden meaning to his art.

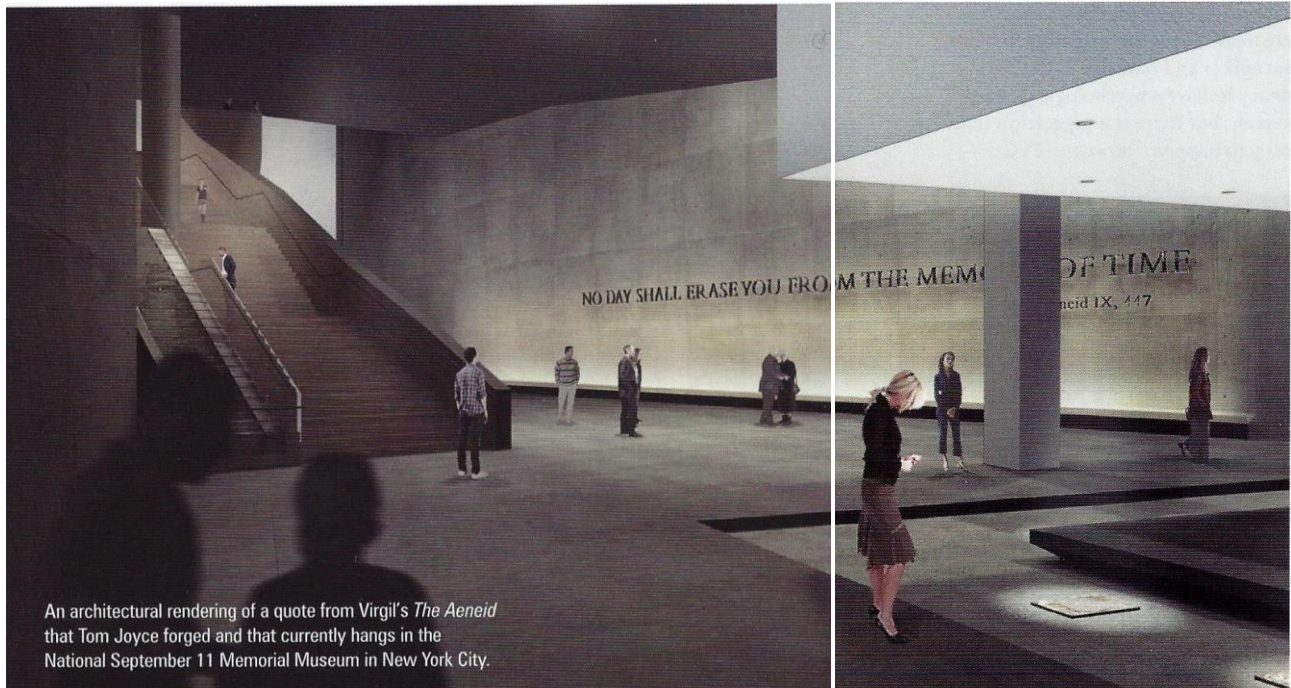
In the early 1970s, a teenaged Joyce apprenticed with blacksmith Peter Wells in El Rito and soon began practicing the trade on his own. His neighbors brought him broken farming implements, and he reformed the iron into new hardware, tools, and art. Today the 58-year-old artist works a similar magic but on a much larger scale. Most of his public sculptures are produced at an industrial forge near Chicago, where Joyce joins a highly skilled team to turn tons of salvaged iron into artworks of his own design.

Among those works is *Two to One*, seven stacked pairs of solid stainless-steel cubes that have a soft, claylike appearance. The sculpture was installed last May in front of the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, with a dedication set for March 2015. Each piece incorporates remnants from items that were manufactured for the military, mining, aeronautics, or energy industries. And while Joyce is aware of the specific lineage of the steel he incorporates, for viewers

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Above: Tom Joyce (right) installs his sculpture *Two to One* outside the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City.



An architectural rendering of a quote from Virgil’s *The Aeneid* that Tom Joyce forged and that currently hangs in the National September 11 Memorial Museum in New York City.

it remains an “indecipherable and mysterious part of the story,” he says.

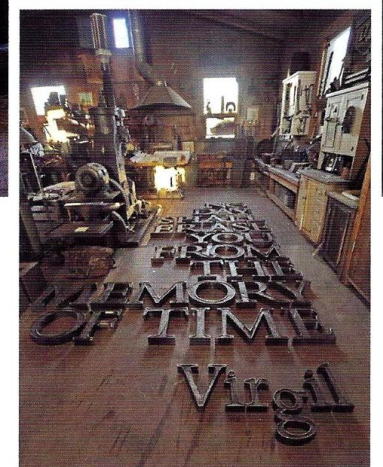
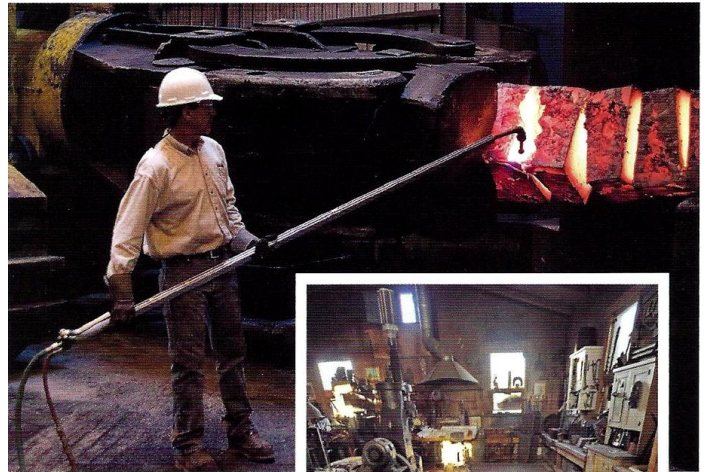
The story behind the material in another of Joyce’s public works is well known, however. Using steel from the World Trade Center ruins, the artist forged letters that today stretch across a concrete wall at the National September 11 Memorial Museum in New York City. Honoring the lives lost during the 2001 terrorist attacks, the letters spell out a verse from Virgil’s epic poem *The Aeneid*: “No day shall erase you from the memory of time.”

This thoughtful and thought-provoking approach is one reason Joyce has gained international acclaim since setting up his Santa Fe studio in 1977. Among his many honors are a MacArthur Fellowship, the New Mexico Governor’s Award for Excellence in the Arts, the Rotary Foundation’s Distinguished Artist of the Year Award, the United States Artists’ Award, and, most recently, an honorary doctorate from Santa Fe University of Art and Design. Joyce’s artwork has been acquired by numerous museums and other public collections, and his museum involvement has taken on another dimension thanks to his role as guest curator for *Striking Iron: The Art of African Blacksmiths*. The first major international exhibition of work by African blacksmiths from ancient times to the present, *Striking Iron* opens in 2016 at UCLA’s Fowler Museum and then travels in the United States and Europe.

Joyce says that he always wanted to live in Europe, and today he divides his time between Santa Fe and Belgium. In his Brussels design studio he works on drawings, clay models, and other preparatory processes before producing sculptures in iron back in the United States. He’s also delving more deeply into drawing and photography, and in the summer of 2015 he’ll display such works alongside his sculptures and lithographs in a solo exhibition at James Kelly Contemporary in Santa Fe.

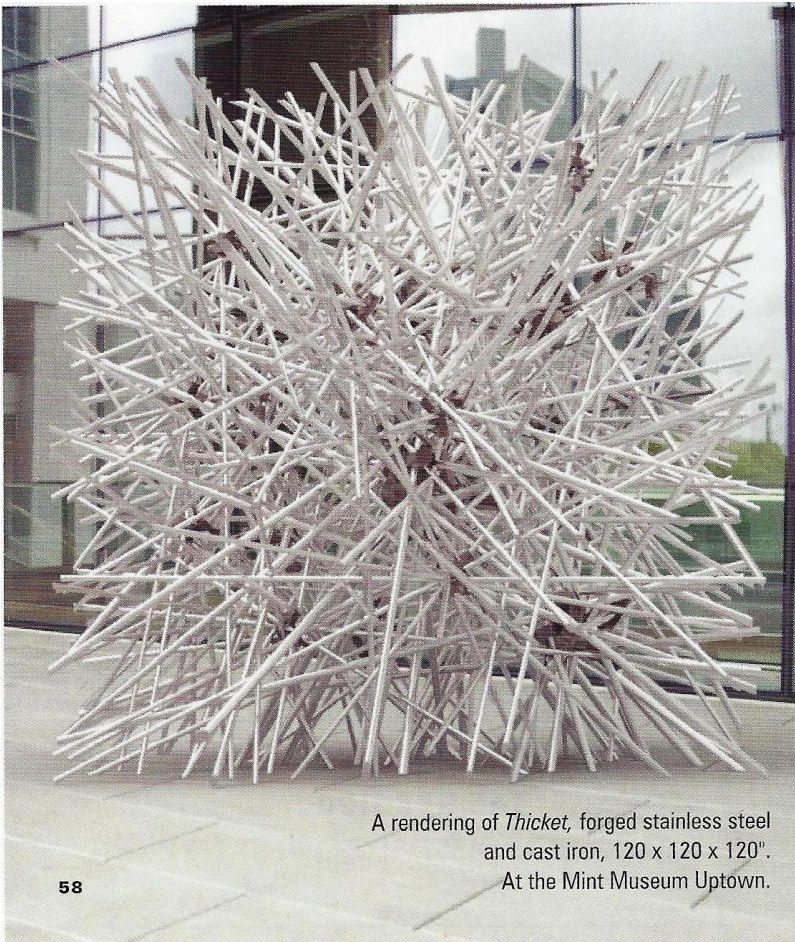
For a recent piece called *Thicket*, which Joyce created for the Mint Museum Uptown in Charlotte, North Carolina, and which will be dedicated in July 2015, the artist drew on remnant steel from his Santa Fe studio. *Thicket* incorporates clusters of stainless-steel rods radiating from nuclei of hammerheads, which are cast from set-aside bits of steel from every project he’s ever made.

In Joyce’s view, there’s no distinction between hard-won, finely honed skills of the hands and the deeply creative spirit that uses them to produce fine art. As he puts it, “I’ve always chosen to walk both paths simultaneously.” ⁵¹



Above: Joyce heats and twists steel to make his sculpture *Berg*. Right: Virgil’s quote laid out in Joyce’s Santa Fe studio.

ABOVE: ANGEL NOBLE. INSET: PIERRE BUCH.



A rendering of *Thicket*, forged stainless steel and cast iron, 120 x 120 x 120".
At the Mint Museum Uptown.