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Colorado: Variable clouds, scattered showers on the eastern plains. Scattered thunderstorms in the mountains. Sunny and hot in western valleys. Details, Sports/Sunday, Page 14.

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ART

## Swords Into Plowshares

Forging meaning from weapons parts and battlefield soil.

By ELLEN BERKOVITCH

**W**AR has been very much on Tom Joyce's mind lately. For this artist-blacksmith, the relentless images of sniper fire and exploding bombs in Iraq testify to metal's enduring yet endlessly mutable role in human aggression.

"The solutions blacksmiths arrive at tend to be the same century after century after century — the practical solutions of developing better weapons, a more efficient weapon," said Mr. Joyce, who has been forging vessels, sculpture, architectural ironwork and public art here in Santa Fe for 28 years.

"Not to point blame," he added. "Everyone is to blame."

In contemplating warfare, Mr. Joyce, 48, has seized on a new tool: a spade. Recently he has been sampling soils at old battlefields in New Mexico like Glorieta Pass, site of a Civil War confrontation, and Santa Fe Plaza, once fortified against Comanche and Apache raids. Friends around the globe have sent samples from places as diverse as Waterloo, site of Napoleon's 1815 defeat, and Gaugamela, east of modern-day Mosul in northern Iraq, where Alexander the Great defeated Darius III of Persia in 331 B.C.

The dirt goes into 65 iron cannonball-size boulders that Mr. Joyce has forged as time capsules of human conflict. Holes drilled into them hold thimblefuls of once-bloodied earth; each is covered by an identifying label of smelted bullet lead. Stacked into five-foot piles that Mr. Joyce calls "Memorial Cairns," the sculptures are on view in an exhibition of Mr. Joyce's work at EVO Gallery here through Sept. 10.

In a time of war, "I wanted to be there" — on the artistic front lines, that is — "owning the responsibility," said Mr. Joyce, a MacArthur Fellow whose work is represented in several major American museums.

In contrast to some other works in the show, like a pair of two-ton sculptures resembling bread loaves and each titled "Bloom," the rocks are light, materially speaking, weighing from 35 to 85 pounds. A human could lift one — maybe even throw one.

For Mr. Joyce, that's part of the point. "I was thinking about iron as a weapon when I made them," he explained. "Rocks or sticks were the first objects that extended the human blow beyond the fist."

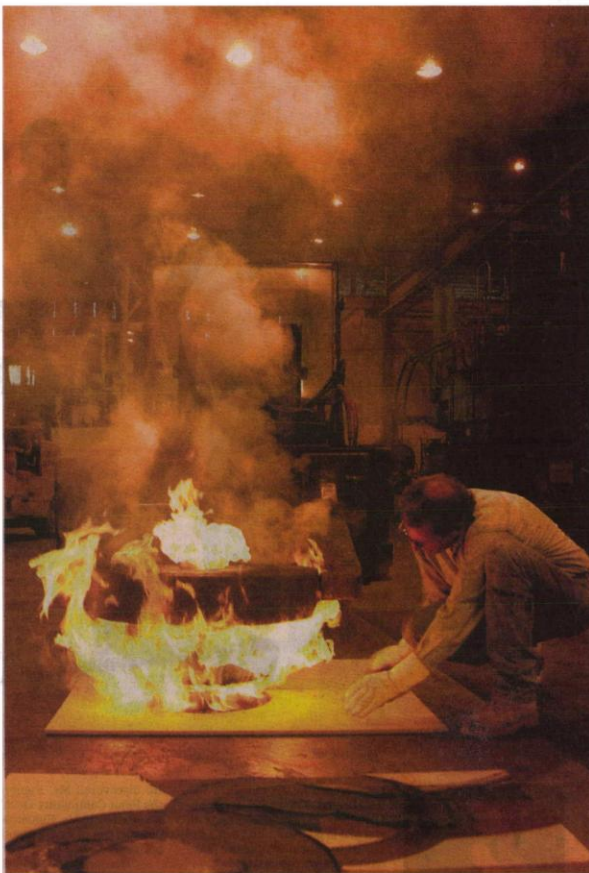
From his earliest days as a working blacksmith, fixing printing presses and farm tools, Mr. Joyce has been fascinated by the multilayered history of physical objects.

Reared in Oklahoma, he moved at the age of 12 to New Mexico and learned blacksmithing at 14 in the rural town of El Rito. Coming across a grubbing hoe that had been patched seven times, he experienced a revelation that would set him on his career path. The painstaking repairs testified to the tool's past, he realized, and to the value it held for its owner. Even as recently as the 1970's, it seems, material objects were not necessarily easily discarded.

Today Mr. Joyce remains devoted to tracing iron's archaeological histories. "Iron is used over and over and over," he said. On the shop table within the adobe-walled forge that he built here with his wife, Julie, he keeps a piece of hoe currency, an elongated iron design that enfolds the working part of a retired farm tool. Outlawed as legal tender in African societies in the 1920's, such pieces of iron currency were used ceremonially through the 1970's.

At a ritual Mumuye marriage in eastern Nigeria, the groom handed the currency to the bride's father. The old hoe concealed beneath was meant to symbolize a link between the groom's successful past farming and the bride's future fertility. "There are places in Africa where iron still has to gently touch the forehead of the bride before marriage is sanctified," Mr. Joyce said.

Somehow, the currents of global trade



Kate Joyce

brought that piece to the Tesuque Flea Market in Santa Fe, where Mr. Joyce scooped it up 16 years ago. For him, the hoe currency bore a kinship with the grubbing hoe he had found as a boy, suggesting a common veneration for iron in societies as diverse as the 19th-century Mumuye and 20th-century New Mexico.

Mr. Joyce was moved to make similar connections after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. On Sept. 11, 2001, he happened to be in Manhattan for an exhibition of his sculpture and architectural ironwork that would open the next day at the American Craft Museum (now the Museum of Arts and Design). His daughters Kate, now 25, a photojournalist, and Irene, 22, a professional dancer, joined him. Kate Joyce flew in from San Francisco to Newark that morning on the plane that became United Airlines Flight 93, which crashed in Pennsylvania later that morning on its return trip.

A few months later a sculptor friend sent Mr. Joyce a small vial of ash from the World Trade Center site. "The initial feeling was to send it back," he said. "Then I started thinking about how to incorporate it in a respectful way."

Working on the first anniversary of 9/11 as

an artist in residence at the Kohler casting plant in Wisconsin, Mr. Joyce blended the ash into an alloy that also included sand from a mandala created by Tibetan monks in Santa Fe and some healing dirt from the Roman Catholic shrine at Chimayo in New Mexico.

He designed a sculptural form based on the vesica piscis, an almond-shaped fish symbol that he describes as common to Christianity and Islam. The sculpture, cast as a gift to his family and a close friend who had lost a brother on 9/11, resembles a football bisected by a fold. Hidden inside the fold is a three-dimensional tetrahedron adapted from the fish symbol.

You can't see the tetrahedron, but you know it is there — hidden but symbolically powerful. This is typical of Mr. Joyce's work.

All the sculpture in his new show has its source in weapons parts and machinery produced at the Scot Forge factory in Spring Grove, Ill. From April to July, Mr. Joyce was allowed to recoup metal scrap and rejects from the 240 million pounds of metal the plant churns out each month for industries ranging from military contractors to sugar mills to oil refineries.

On the Scot Forge floor, Mr. Joyce would se-



Herbert Lotz

lect scrap and carry it from the staging area to a furnace, where it would be loaded and smelted at 2,100 to 2,400 degrees. "Manipulators," giant backhoes with pincers, then took the iron from the room-size furnace to a press where Mr. Joyce had only 8 to 12 minutes to forge it into desired shape.

"It moves quickly," said Mr. Joyce, a thin, fleet figure with balletic movements. Working with him were a press operator, a manipulator driver and a helper.

Under an agreement with the factory, he could not expose any parts of the machine metals that might make them identifiable, like their serial numbers. Often, he said, he did not know what purpose the metals he retrieved were intended to serve.

Over all, he used 30 tons of Scot Forge's scrap metal for sculptures — more than he had forged in his previous 27 years as an artist. Even so, he said, "It looked totally insignificant in their yard with all the other materials waiting for transport."

What he doesn't exhibit, he will smelt down and recycle in the centuries-old tradition of blacksmiths. In creating a baptismal font in 1994 for the Santa Maria de la Paz Catholic Community in Santa Fe, for example, he sought to incorporate objects donated by parishioners — garden fences, keys found by a nun on the day she took her vows, a nail from a chapel destroyed by fire.

For Mr. Joyce, who describes himself as a lapsed Catholic, his mixed feelings about religion didn't matter. As always, he wanted to create a repository of history.

"In the same way that there's a good chance that iron I'm using has parts of my granddad's old car in it," he said, "there's an equally good chance that there exists in its molecular makeup a Scythian sword or a Hittite ax still poised, waiting for the next battle."

Creative inferno: Left, the blacksmith Tom Joyce at work; top, his sculpture "Berg"; and above, "Bloom," on view at EVO Gallery in Santa Fe, N.M.

TOM JOYCE

EVO GALLERY  
An exhibition of his work is on view in Santa Fe, N.M., through Sept. 10.