

JOE FAFARD: Cut-outs/Out-cuts

December 12, 2012 - January 26, 2013

ART
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"L'aube du loup 3", steel laser out-cuts, powder coated, 2011



"Cock and Pony Story", steel laser out-cuts, powder coated, 2012

Cover: "Saint Coq", steel laser out-cuts, powder coated, 2011

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As a master's student at Penn State, Joe went frequently to New York to visit the rich collections and thematic exhibitions of the city's many museums. I remember his telling me that one of the pieces that stopped him in his tracks was Picasso's "She Goat" which he saw at the Museum of Modern Art. The sculpture of a goat had been 'assembled' by Picasso from discarded fragments - metal, ceramics, even palm fronds - that to Picasso's eye suggested body parts for the nanny goat he imagined he would make: a basket for the rib cage, clay pots for the udders, palm fronds for ribs, spine and nose and pieces of metal for various structural parts. The she-goat Joe saw was a bronze version of the original assemblage but all the found pieces could still be identified.

It wasn't so much that Picasso inspired Joe to make sculpture from fragments; it was that a major, internationally recognized artist also saw art in the world around him and used the plethora of discarded bits and pieces to create new objects. After all, Joe had grown up watching his mother make Christmas presents from bars of soap, re-tailoring a fur coat to turn the garbage bin into a bear, creating small sculptures from clay. He had seen his father re-using everything on the farm that might still serve some purpose, fixing and repairing horse harnesses and farm machinery, saving whatever could be used again. In a way, Picasso's goat was an extension of Joe's own experience growing up in the small farming community on the border of Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

The art world that swirled around Joe as a graduate student had very definite ideas about what art was and what it wasn't. Joe found a niche in that world by pursuing one of the acceptable genres, kinetic art. Significantly enough, it allowed him to rummage around in electric shops and salvage yards and create assemblages that passed muster with his teachers. It also however signalled what was to be a major characteristic of Joe as an artist. He respects and practises craftsmanship in all his works but his imagination and his explorations are not limited by either the fashions of the art world or the dictates of what used to be called 'fine art.' Perhaps, in this exploratory characteristic, he saw in Picasso a kindred spirit.

The laser-cut steel works are the most recent of Joe's explorations into techniques and materials by which to deepen and broaden his art. This exploration has piggy-backed on the development of the rapidly expanding electronic world of computers and communication. The combination of electronic imaging and image-controlled machines gave Joe new ways of realizing the sculptures he wanted to create. At first, the computer controlled imaging allowed him to translate drawings on paper to drawings in steel. Even though the cut images were still two-dimensional, they were free standing and therefore took on many of the characteristics of three-dimensional works. He found he could create a free play of positive and negative spaces - emptiness opened out into the space which the sculpture occupied; line became three-dimensional material. In Joe's work emptiness in space could have a positive presence; three-dimensional line could recede into space. He had already experimented with drawing in space in his linear bronze sculptures, but the lines had been painstakingly cut from Styrofoam boards and then subjected to the lengthy process of moulds and poured bronze. Now he could move directly from drawing to metal. He could control the size of the final piece. He could reach out to the larger public by using this method for commissioned works that would be seen by many who might never go to an art gallery. A prime example of his awareness that art was all around waiting to be recognized.

Characteristically, Joe was not satisfied simply to continue the original experimentation. Almost by accident, he learned how to address the issue of patina for the steel works. Commercial designers and manufacturers use powdered pigments sprayed on magnetized steel and heated to a high degree, bonding pigment to steel in a weather-resistant permanency. A small business

in Regina took an interest in what Joe was doing and provided what became another studio for him in their plant. Joe found he could apply different pigments to the two sides of the steel and by blending colours and 'filigreeing' the pieces, the surface could be not only durable but subtly 'painted.' These pieces could be large, as large as the oven in the plant at least, and placed outside without fear of deterioration.

The next step was his creation of real three-dimensional work by joining two or more laser-cut pieces together to give depth to the pieces. The result was a new opportunity for realizing a fuller use of the techniques he had developed from the original, computer-controlled works.

Laser-cutting, of course, not only created the piece he had drawn; it also resulted in piles of fragments that had been cut away. It is typical of Joe that these fragments did not represent discards for him. They were a part of the beginning, part of the world from which the drawing had extracted the piece. Joe is not a discarder: He created works from clay and still does; he created works from bronze and still does; he created works from steel ... The world is one and ultimately everything is connected in a most amazing wholeness. The fragments cut away are part of a larger whole.

A number of works in this exhibition are constructs of fragments, re-assembled to create new forms. Look at them carefully. On the one level, the pieces tell individual stories, sometimes because of their form, sometimes because of their origin in earlier creations. On another level, each work has been carefully constructed and given a distinctive patina to create a new work or, better, are joined once more in a former wholeness. They say to the viewer, there are no limits as to what can become art, but there is an imagination and craftsmanship that can give our fragmented world a meaningful and uplifting wholeness.

Terrence Heath

2012



"Bub the Bull", steel laser cut-out, powder coated, 2012



"Premiers Cow IV", steel laser cut-out, cast bronze base, powder coated, 2009



"Harmonie II", steel laser cut-out, powder coated, 2009