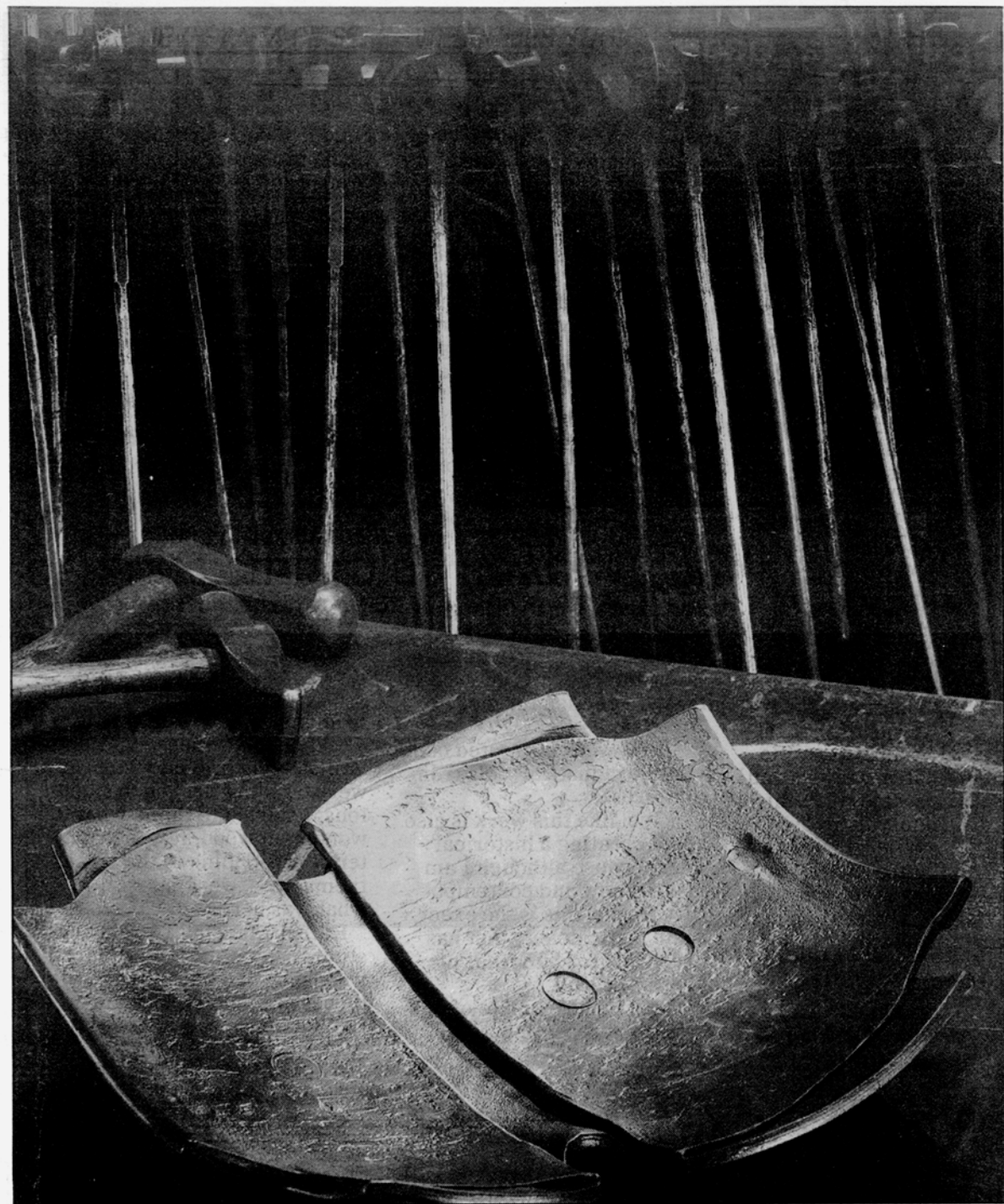


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Untitled forged steel vessel by Tom Joyce

Winter's Edge show offers an eclectic art combination

By CANDELORA VERSACE

The line between fine art and craft continues to blur as traditional crafts like basketry, ceramics, wood-turning and blacksmithing become appreciated for their sculptural properties and move into galleries long dominated primarily by wall art.

The new Okun Gallery is working hard at erasing that line completely, and the current show features more than two dozen craftspeople who are widely recognized as being at the top of the ladder in their respective media.

"There really is no line," gallery owner Barbara Okun said on a recent afternoon. "If the quality of the work is high, that's what counts. Our philosophy is to show major painters

and sculptors right alongside masters of contemporary crafts."

Okun said the first three shows of the fledgling gallery are group shows. (*Winter's Edge*, running until Dec. 16, is the second) designed to set a sense of direction in the new space, which opened in late September.

"In the spring we'll have one-person shows in part of the gallery, with a group show running in the other areas at the same time," she said. Okun has been an art dealer since 1973, working in St. Louis.

She has been living in Santa Fe for the last three years with her husband Ed, a retired physician who now helps her run the spacious gallery, located just across the street from Bagelmania on N. Guadalupe at Catron St.

Winter's Edge is an eclectic combination that includes

three-foot-tall baskets by Lissa Hunter, wooden maquettes of huge outdoor sculptures by Jackie Ferrara and delicate, glazed porcelain vessels by Toshiko Takaazu.

Takaazu developed a technique of leaving a tiny ball of clay inside her almost-closed vases that rattles inside, adding the element of sound to an otherwise silent art form. (Okun said she would prefer the curious visitor to ask to hear the little rattle, rather than try it themselves.)

Tom Joyce, a steel sculptor who has lived in Santa Fe for the last 15 years, has several folded and forged steel vessels in the exhibition which demonstrate the evolution of iron and steel work from the ancient art of blacksmithing to its current uses as an architectural detail and art object.

"Actually, I started as a blacksmith in El Rito when I

was 16," Joyce said. "At the time I was making agricultural tools, and it was sort of a self-made curriculum for me, because I learned about the historical elements of the craft as well as creating a base for a new direction for it."

Joyce, who has been creating large, site-specific installations and architectural elements like gates, railings and light fixtures, said this is his first opportunity to create forged steel objects without a place in mind for them.

"The gallery is serving somewhat as a bridge while I move in this new direction," he said.

"The vessels are really along the same lines as my previous work, utilizing a series of folded shapes, but these are much smaller. They are a simple means of exercising ideas that relate to the sculptural form."

Joyce usually starts out with a flat piece of mild steel measuring 10 feet long, six inches wide and a quarter inch thick. The steel is then heated and randomly folded and wrapped against itself until it makes a large pile.

It is then stretched, hit with a sledgehammer or air hammer and otherwise manipulated until the finished object is small enough to sit on a table or pedestal, left alone or perhaps graced with a single flower.

"I like the smaller format because I can work through a series of ideas fairly quickly. It definitely represents a different direction for me," Joyce said.

All his work is created using vintage industrial tools from the 1920s.

"I feel like this work is also about creating a historical link, because although I am making new and contemporary forms, this is the exact same methodology that has been used for hundreds of years," he said.

"There's an element of education to presenting a piece like this in a gallery," he added. "People are more used to the processes for casting bronze and steel. Forged steel is a little bit rarer."

Ronald Davis, a painter from California who moved to Taos two years ago, has switched media and is now creating large wall sculptures out of the local wood.

Inspired by the process of building four fairly large hogans with several Navajo architects, he has abandoned painting for the time being while he adjusts to the changes in his living circumstances.

While in Malibu, his neighbors were rock stars living beyond tall gates and seen only in their limousines.

"Now I'm living in this adobe hogan with mud floors. It's been a big change," he said in a telephone interview

from his home in Taos.

"When I saw these vigas and latillas lying around while we were building the hogan skeletons, I started to think, what wonderful wood. It was a matter of responding to the pieces themselves, working with what was here."

Rather than build a painting studio, Davis started off with a woodshop and his newest pieces are painted logs arranged in abstract shapes. "All the time that I was painting, which is about 25 years, the sculptural form was always sort of in the background," he said.

Other top names from the contemporary American crafts movement currently showing at Okun Gallery are Ed Rossbach, Marvin Lipofsky, Betty Woodman and Ed Moulthrop.

Rossbach is known as the father figure of contemporary basketry, according to Okun. His delicate mixed-media baskets often incorporate manipulated photographic images and irregular surfaces.

Lipofsky has been on the forefront of glass technology, experimenting with amorphous shapes distinguished by sandblasted and etched surfaces. Woodman brings a contemporary sensibility to ceramics, playfully crossing boundaries between sculpture and function.

And Moulthrop has created several exquisitely turned and polished wooden vessels that highlight his position as the father of modern woodwork, Okun said.

Lillian Elliot, whose sculptural baskets are on the cover of this month's issue of *American Craft* and Mark Di Suvero, known for his immense outdoor sculptures, also have pieces in this exhibit.

In addition to a vast array of three-dimensional objects and techniques, Okun has brought in several painters known throughout the contemporary art world since the 1970s.

Frank Owen, Ed Ruscha, Philip Wofford, Jennifer Bartlett and Santa Fean Tuck Hayward all have pieces in the current show.

DETAILS

Who: Group show
What: Winter's Edge
When: Through Dec. 16
Where: Okun Gallery, 301 N. Guadalupe