

ART

# Man, motion, meaning

*The metal sculpture of Mt. Marion artist Alex Kveton*



*History repeats itself, but the special call of an art which has passed away is never reproduced. It is utterly gone out of the world as the song of a destroyed wild bird.*

-Joseph Conrad

BY QUINN O'CALLAGHAN

**A**LEX KVETON CAN MAKE sculptures move. Or at least it feels that way. Alex, born and raised in Czechoslovakia during the Soviet period and educated at the Prague Academy of Art Architecture and Design, is a Saugerties-based, New York City-oriented sculptor, printmaker, and artist. He lives with his wife, Barbara, off of the Glasco Turnpike. He's exhibited at MoMA, the Czech National Gallery in Prague, and the Jimmy Carter Museum, among others.

He's a nice guy; enthusiastic and carrying one of the best accents in the world. He's obviously been working for a while this Sunday morning. Some fingers on his hands are blackened and he wears a smock.

His studio and workspace are shockingly clean, for an artist. His style is distinct and easily recognizable. His humanoid sculptures, comprised of fabricated pieces of metal, have clean edges and lack in physical detail; his more imaginative work is jet smooth and flows like mercury.

On a shelf sits a note-covered cardboard prototype of a soon to be metal torso. "[They are] almost

like templates. They are templates... I take from every one, you see, I have all those notes and marks," he gestures toward the note-ridden torso, "then I start cutting the metal, because to start with the metal directly—you know, alla prima—and if you don't know where you're going to end, you could end up somewhere you don't want to be."

His planning works. Imagination and talent could lead someone to craft a nifty looking human torso, sure, but nothing as engaging as Alex's iron-borne bodies. The "muscles" on these pieces are tilted and telling. The bodies seem to exude a frozen fluidity. That is to say that they don't seem dead and timeless when you look at them, like a smiling god in frozen marble, but as though they could move—probably dance—if they really wanted to.

"You've seen hundreds of torsos. You go to museums and they have a torso—they are beautiful, from old Greeks and Romans until today. But the way I fabricate is something that, in quality of fabrication, I've never seen it before. It's interesting for me to go in that way," he says, referring to his sculpture making style. "The sculpture is a three-dimensional object. This means that on all sides, something should happen. That's how I feel, anyway."

There are empty spaces in Alex's sculptures. In a piece called "Giovanni," a golden, leaning torso, there is open area below the shoulders and between the abdominals and the body's sides, as well as below the shoulders. "The negative spaces are giving the suggestion that something is going to happen... the negative space fills the area," explains the artist.

In "Guide of Souls," a darker piece that can be described as a figure physically between Charon, Dick "Night Train" Lane, and Batman, makes use of shadow by creating dark voids in the chest and neck to make the figure more intimidating—almost supernatural.

It's not just the sculptures he plans in advance. Every piece, including his free-form work, is modeled in cardboard. "It's a beauty to make something in abstract form, but to have that movement," says Alex.

Alex has been creating abstract pieces since his studies in Prague. These pieces aren't abstract in the way you'd think—in that they aren't sculptures of the things you see floating in front of your lids when close your eyes. They aren't chunky nothingisms from the absolute backwater of his imagination. They are meditations on motion.

Alex presents one of his cardboard drafts, three faintly curved, elongated blades flowing backwards

**CAPTIONS:** This page: "Giovanni"; Opposite, left to right, "Solar Eclipse," "Boy" and "Harnessing Wind."

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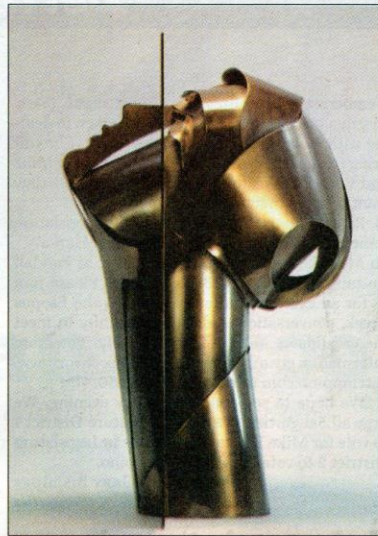
and lifting off the ground from the base. Think along the lines of a few scimitars placed lengthwise and planted in the ground by the hilt. The finished piece is meant to be shipped to a Russian train station; the intimation is obvious. It's a bullet train, or least the soul of a bullet train, streamlined and effective. And the best part is, you don't even need to squint your imagination to see it, like you do with so many other abstract pieces.

Similar are his free-form studies on ship sails. Searing, chrome-bright sheets of metal on a base of the same material that makes the sails seem to flow into one another. Alex's abstract work is identifiable and charming. There's a piece called "First Kiss," featuring two rectangular drops of metal leaning into each other and nuzzling.

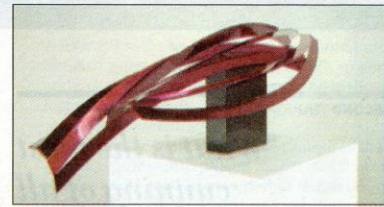
Alex has been on the scene for over three decades.

**WHAT IS ART?**

Art, according to this notion that Alex subscribes to, is summarily love and thought actualized.



He's had his work featured in Europe and all across the states. His pieces have been featured in design



magazines both foreign and domestic. How did he end up on top of Mt. Marion?

"It's very simple," he replies. "When I came here, to the United States, I ended up like any good immigrant, especially artists, in New York City. After many years living in New York city I figure I don't have to be there every day and hustle every day, and go to the studio and sit in traffic for an hour."

Saugerties was a natural choice. He and his wife are avid skiers, they have friends up here, and Saugerties is nurturing a growing art culture. "Saugerties is going up in the spectrum of Hudson Valley art," said Kveton. "There's no question."

He appreciates the fact that in upstate New York, he's not just Faceless Artist X. "In New York City, you are anonymous all the time. You don't show up

*Continued on page 14*

**MAN, MOTION, MEANING**

Continued from page 11

in a place for two months they don't know about you anymore. While we're here dealing with the people, it's really a pleasure."

Our conversation turns to the nature of art and the artist.

"A famous lawyer from the early 1920's, he said if somebody works with his hand, he's a laborer. If someone works with the hands and brain, he's a craftsman. If someone works with a hand, brain, and heart, he's an artist." He's paraphrasing a quote from attorney Louis Nizer. He obviously takes this to heart, and worries that the public in the contemporary era doesn't know what art is.

Art, according to this notion that Alex subscribes to, is summarily love and thought actualized. "Many curators are looking for the novelty. They are looking for something shocking, something new, something that will catch the people's attention. Now, you have some many of those things, how could define it? Is it really art or is it some kind of novelty that will disappear?"

As I drive away I reflect on those words. It seems there are artists and there are artists. There are



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artists who live on the edge of artistic reason and produce fast-fading novelties. There are artists who ride fads. There are artists who aren't really

artists. But then, there are men and women who live partly in their imagination, and who can bring back to this plane what the find there. There are men and women of hands, heart, and brain. There are people like Alex Kveton.

Alex's works are currently on display at Bosobel House and Gardens until October 10th and he has just finished a commission for Leggio Park in Catskill. ●