

Environmental art

Mohawk Valley influences visiting sculptors

By JONAS KOVER
Observer-Dispatch

Four out-of-town sculptors are getting the lay of the land as they create things at Sculpture Space, the former Utica Steam and Boiler Works factory in West Utica.

One is making a steel farmhouse, influenced by what she has seen in the Mohawk Valley. A second is digging holes to serve as molds for concrete forms. A third is thrilled with the abundance of wood here and the last wants to implant five tuning forks in the ground to keep the city in harmony.

You can meet all four at a reception for funded residents Lou Getty and Beth Galston at Sculpture Space, 12 Gates St., off Whitesboro Street, from 5 to 8 p.m. tomorrow.

Getty will be assistant professor of sculpture at Hamilton College this year.

After graduating from the Syracuse University Master of Fine Arts program last year, she no longer had access to a large studio. Her tenure at Sculpture Space has allowed her to sculpt once again and has given her the opportunity to work with copper.

Getty's sculptures merge shaped concrete, which she molds in earthen holes, with metallic parts.

"I'm interested in combining organic forms that reflect the human body, plants or animals with tool elements," she said.

One piece contains an ear-like form and a propeller — another has a yellow kidney-like element embedded in a steel-rimmed question mark.

She sees the "sculptural object as a poetic thing — a visual poem." People can relate to it because of its three-dimensionality and material appearance, she said. "It is a metaphor for physical and spiritual survival in the world."

Galston of Boston changed her style after arriving at the facility.

A sculptor and environmental artist, she teaches three-dimensional design at Montserrat College of Art. Until now, she has mainly worked indoors making room-sized environments using light sources, fabrics and scrims to convert a room into an art work.

Without a confined space here, she



Photo by Gerry Raymond

Wang Po Shu, of Rome, Italy, with a pendulum that he will use to locate energy sources along Genesee Street. He will plant tuning forks at each spot. His project aims to help Utica get in touch with its earthly vibrations.

began to think of Utica and the Mohawk Valley region as her environment. "I got excited about farm structures, farm houses, corn cribs, silos," she said.

The result is a simple-looking steel building, similar to a farm house or chicken coop. The 21-foot long structure is 3-feet wide and 12-feet long. It is covered with perforated metal sheets with the only entrance at the middle. "Some very subtle things go on in the inside environment with light and space. Things are perceived with certain illusions," Galston said.

Another sculptor whose ideas were transformed because of Sculpture Space is Joe Chirchirillo of Jersey City.

Chirchirillo usually works in wood, making figural shapes of humans or animals that convey psychological ideas or feelings.

Until now, he has mainly used plywood for his sculptures, building them up until they looked natural. He has discovered

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the abundance of wood in this area and currently is working with large hemlock logs and lumber.

"It is an opportunity to be close to the materials I am interested in," he said. "I wouldn't be able to get this in the city. I will probably buy a lot more of it."

Wang Po Shu, a Hong Kong native living in Rome, Italy, wants to help Utica get in touch with its earthly vibrations.

For his geomantic sculpture, Wang said he will have to seek approval from the Utica Common Council to plant five small cigar-size objects along Genesee Street.

The sculpture could be termed "new wave" but Wang said its roots are very old and can be found in Chinese, Roman, Greek and Native American traditions.

Geomancy is the belief that earth is a living entity. A geomantic sculpture is primarily a dialogue with the environment, he said. In this case, he said it is like an "acupuncture of the land."

Wang has charted the "spine" of Utica, which he found to be Genesee Street, and has discovered five energy sources on it through dowsing with rods or pendulums.

At each spot, he plans to place a tuning fork. A sign above will state: "Here is one of the five locations where a "C" tuning fork is buried. You are cordially invited to invoke, evoke and provoke a consonance."

People's actions and the normal street traffic will cause the vibrations, he said.

"Any intercession would alter the energy pattern."



Photo by Gerry Raymond

Joe Chirchirillo of Jersey City with his work entitled, "Bending Over Backwards."

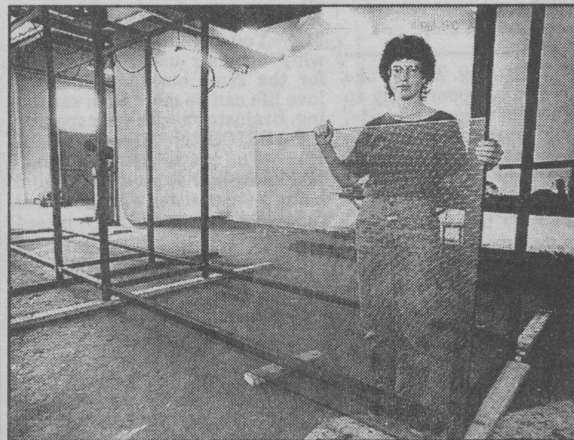


Photo by Gerry Raymond

Beth Galston of Boston with a metal mesh plate that will be incorporated into her sculpture entitled, "farmHouse."