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Grace In Metalwork

SCULPTOR JOE GITTERMAN CAPTURES FLUIDITY OF MOTION

SERENDIPITY. A sweet sounding word and, for those whose good fortune it is to experience such a fortuitous confluence of events, the end result is often life changing.

Joe Gitterman of Washington had spent almost four decades making metal sculptures, basically for himself, his family and a few close friends. He wasn't looking for fame or fortune; he just loved working in steel, bronze and other metals and capturing his vision of fluidity of motion in his sculptures. It was three years ago when fate intervened and Mr. Gitterman, now at the, ahem, mature age of 77, found himself with a whole new purpose for his art. The public has, well, found him.

"I like to say I had a 40-year hobby," says Mr. Gitterman, as he sits inside a cozy café in Washington Depot on a summer morning. "Then I had a show with painter Susan Monserud at the Behnke-Doherty Gallery in Washington Depot and all hell broke loose," he adds with a laugh.

Indeed, Mr. Gitterman's works drew instant praise from those attending the exhibit and he began to

sell his works and receive commissions.

"I couldn't believe it," he says. "I think if I wanted it to happen it wouldn't. Yes, it was serendipitous that I displayed at the show. Really, selling my work was the furthest thing

from my mind. The one common thread of conversation at the show was that people didn't know that I was a sculptor."

So, okay, the word was out and Mr. Gitterman, who formerly worked on Wall Street, quickly came into demand. He pieces are in collections ranging from Connecticut to Florida and beyond. He was commissioned to create seven sculptures for



Above, Joe Gitterman of Washington framed by one of his sculptures. Left, "Movement 5"; contributed photograph.

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the Royal Sonesta Hotel in Houston, Texas.

"They have a wall entrance and there were eight-foot-square niches that they wanted to fill with art, so they commissioned me to fill those spaces with seven-foot-tall fall pieces. They are made of mirrored stainless steel."

Mr. Gitterman, who works in a modest studio in his home, is most proud of being asked to display at the Governor's Sculpture Park in Hartford. One of two "Couple" sculptures, made of stainless steel on a bending-rolling machine from a copper maquette (model), is located in the park, which also features a number of Connecticut artists, including former Litchfield County Times owner Arthur Carter.

The surface of the 90-inch-tall sculpture (the other "Couple" is in a garden at a private home in Vineyard Haven, Mass.), was burnished

with an abstract finish to heighten texture and produce a mild reflective quality. The two elements of the sculpture may at times touch each other in the wind, producing a pleasant sound.

"It was such an honor to be asked to display at the Governor's Sculpture Park," he says with a smile.

"It's a beautiful exhibit and the public can take tours of the park, the only one of its kind in the United States, covering 4.5 acres. To be included among such great Connecticut artists is a joy I didn't expect."

Mr. Gitterman, who dabbled at art as a child and then took evening classes in New York City to fine tune his knowledge of his craft, says he has been greatly influenced by the human body, specifically the shapes, gestures, and momentary poses created by dancers. Through observation and sketches, he conceives a

visual image of a motion and attempts to infuse that motion into three-dimensional materials. The special properties inherent in each of the materials he works with—marble, plaster, clay, copper, sheet metal, wax, bronze, aluminum and mirrored stainless steel—guide him in creating the shape, balance and potential energy that makes each sculpture visually and spatially engaging.

In addition to working on studio-size sculptures that are easily accessible for gallery exhibitions

and private collectors, he creates new sculptures in a variety of sizes, materials, finishes and colors for both indoor and outdoor installation. These works can be customized to meet specific site location needs or preferences of individual and institutional collectors.

In each case, the sculpture he makes is a unique, individual work of art.

For larger pieces, Mr. Gitterman designs a small sculpture and then has it cast by a fabricator and the work's exterior refined.

His sculptures, naturally,



Above, "Female Torso," and, at top right, "Leap 8"; contributed photographs.

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Left, "Folded Form 2," and below, "Dance 1"; contributed photographs. Above, the sculptor's mark on a piece; photograph by Laurie Gaboardi.



evoke a strong sense of action, their edges often angular and flowing in order to evoke a feeling of movement, but in a way that seems connected to the surrounding environment and the viewer. In his "Gesture" series of sculptures the maquettes (models) for the works were created in wax, cardboard, or paper. Mirrored stainless steel sheets were then worked on bending-rolling machines to replicate the maquettes before being partially powder coated. The pieces in his "Flight" series were made, free hand, from antique copper sheets. In his "Dance" series, the sculptures were made in sheet wax, then cast in bronze, using the lost wax process. (The lost wax process simply makes a fire proof cast around the wax image that had had wax "pipes" added to it so that when the wax is melted away

molten bronze can be poured into the created space and thus replicate the wax image in bronze).

Four of the series were finished with a patina, then hand rubbed with wax. The others were machine polished and coated with polyurethane to ensure they retained their luster. Some of the sculptures have shadow areas highlighted with black paint.

Mr. Gitterman, a shock of finely groomed white hair the only hint as to his real age, and his wife, Joanne (in the theater in New York City for a

number of years, whom he says is "critically supportive") have lived in Washington for the past 18 years. The couple has three children and five grandchildren. One son, Paul, is a therapist, Tom owns an art gallery and daughter, Vicky, is an art therapist, all of which has made the Gittermans pleased and fulfilled.

"We joke with Vicky that she combined the two boys' careers into one," says Mr. Gitterman, who often spent weekends with his family in Litchfield County during

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his working years. He adds, "We live in such a lovely place, surrounded by so many talented people. We love it here."

He says he has been influenced by many sculptors during his career. "I admire Constantin Brancusi and Henry Moore and also a number of contemporary artists. I enjoy the work of today's sculptors as much as I do the classics."

His works range in price from around \$1,000 for smaller pieces to "tens of thousands" for larger sculptures. "It all sounds great, but my agent gets a third, the fabricator a third and I get a third."

He is represented by Harrison Gallery in Williamstown, Mass., where some of his works are on display, Art and Interiors of Westport, Corman Arts of London, England, JSO Art Associates of Westport, and Soho Myriad Art Consulting Services of Atlanta, Ga., Los Angeles and London.

Unwilling to rest on his laurels and churn out pieces for commission, Mr. Gitterman looks like a young boy with a glint in his eye when he speaks of his next venture. "I'm starting to work with acrylic resins, which is completely new for me."

It might have taken Joe Gitterman a few years to get noticed, but there seems no slowing down his artistic ventures anytime soon, even as he approaches the magic "eight-o."



Left, "Couple 3," and, above, "Gesture 3"; contributed photographs.

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