

Steel presents exciting sculptural challenge

By Corinne Abalt
staff writer

For a relatively young man (a shade over 30), sculptor Jay Lefkowitz has had an intense, impressive career.

He's back working and showing his sculpture in this area after spending some six years in Europe, particularly Carrara, Italy, where he studied stone and marble carving as it has been done for a thousand years.

Now married and living in Birmingham, Lefkowitz has extended his considerable technical and creative skills to steel.

Both steel and marble sculpture are included in his one-man show at Schwyer-Galdo Galleries, 330 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, which continues through the month.

THE COMBINATION is intriguing. For while there is some crossover in technical expertise, the concepts in working the two mediums are different.

Marble, with its cool, sensuous (especially when polished) somewhat austere qualities, warms under the Lefkowitz influence which often extends to a playful undulating curve, a gentle turn and the busts without faces which still seem like portraits.

And while the Lefkowitz touch can warm pristine bardiglio (gray-blue), marquinian (black) and other beautiful marbles, it turns steel to paper.

The painted steel sculptures which he produced after returning here in 1981 (not his first go at this metal) have the look of foldable, moveable paper cutouts.

The artist works with quarter inch steel and plans to move to three-quarter inch soon, still keeping the illusion of lightness.

His steel pieces begin with a paper maquette where the paper is folded and cut.

"I lay it out in steel in three separate pieces. The cuts must be done perfectly. Then I weld and grind and weld and grind and weld and grind. I do my cutting with a band saw."

He said he is about to get a new type cutting machine for his work.

BECAUSE he is a meticulous, exacting craftsman, the welds are undetectable on the sleek surfaces. The interior and exterior edges of each cutout are as smooth as marble.

"I never let anything out of my shop that isn't right technically," he said matter-of-factly.

Like many a sculptor, Lefkowitz likes to walk around his works, touching them, running his hands down the side, brushing away a speck of dust, making sure they are without even that kind of temporary blemish.

As he moved about through the new steel pieces at Schwyer-Galdo Galleries, he remarked, "These pieces have the potential to be any size."

He has made them as small as 8-10 inches in brass and would welcome an opportunity to turn them into major outdoor works up to several stories high.

THEY also serve to illustrate the use of negative and positive space for his art students at Henry Ford Community College.

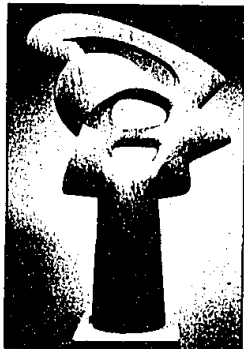
It is the inner relationships in these new steel pieces, the clear presence which changes with each angle, the handling of the metal, the coupling of strength and lightness and fine design which gives them a compelling immediacy.

Moreover, they are immediately likeable because they are familiar material, which has very little innate appeal. But, here it is, interesting and beautiful — a kind of sculptural ugly duckling story.

Lefkowitz said he will continue working in steel until he completes all of his ideas — and, fortunately, that could take quite a while.

This is the beginning of what promises to be another long, fruitful period of work for Lefkowitz.

Lefkowitz, a 1970 Groves High School graduate who studied at Columbus School of Design (Ohio) before continuing his study in



Statin-finished marble sculpture has a pristine, though at times almost whimsical, beauty about it.

Staff photos by Mindy Saunders

Europe, said it may take him 10 seconds to do a sketch and six weeks to make the piece. But, the making of the work, the long hours of polishing and grinding, chiseling and sculpting, the business of creating fluidly and beauty from stone and metal, excites him.

"The time when I do my best work is when I'm really loose, he said, "I'm still having such fun."

Gallery hours are 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday-Saturday.



Jay Lefkowitz, hometown artist who spent six years in Europe learning the ancient skills with marble, from the original

source, has developed a special interest in working with steel.



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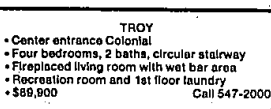
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