



*Wandering*

### SURFACE TREATMENT

With COVID-19 still slowing gallery openings, we will keep your art experiences alive by looking back at some memorable shows. Today we return to The International Museum of Art & Science for George Tobolowsky's 2016 exhibition, "Is This the Road I'm On?" A Tobolowsky sculpture is permanently installed on the front grounds of the museum.

#### **George Tobolowsky: Is This the Road I'm On?**

This sculptor adds elegance and substance to formally constructed welded sculpture.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

George Tobolowsky's sculpture has been referred to as form and substance. And it's true. His welded and seemingly abstract works initially appear to fall into the expected artistic camp of 20<sup>th</sup> century formalism, whose primary purpose was the combination of simple shapes. Tobolowsky fast-forwards over that part. His exhibit at IMAS, *George Tobolowsky: Is This the Road I'm On?* was displayed at IMAS, beginning on the grounds with works leading into the main exhibition in the large Clark Gallery.

Yes, we've seen a lot of welded sculpture, but Tobolowsky raises the bar. Yes, he also works with scrap metal from scrap yards, but his selection and combination of discarded materials is far more perceptive than most artist-welders. His work reflects a witty engagement with cast-offs, imbuing them with a sense of

intended planning rather than the assumed serendipity; he also has an uncanny ability for wonderful visual analogy. His "Tool Menorah #2" is a brilliant incorporation of tools into a vision of religious orthodoxy where large drill bits become candles held by machine cogs. Drill bits have the ability to penetrate solid materials and become substitutes for candles whose symbolism penetrates the soul. This entire vertical procession rests on a large wrench that is supported by a horizontally structured tool reinforcing the message of stability through community. Like this piece, most of the sculptures incorporate tables or stands, affording the works psychological and ideological independence.

The way in which Tobolowsky uses materials is fascinating. Stainless steel parts mingle among basic iron scraps, allowing tonal variety among the metals, and original paint and markings on discarded parts add visual character to the overall designs. His earlier works in the show are formal and emotionally distant, but moving on, the sometimes-quirky selections of sculptural parts soon begin to reflect his unique artistic personality and bring the viewer into his process. We feel his delight in the object. For instance, the small sculpture, "The Welder," is an early window into his sense of humor. An upright large, yellow colored, red wheeled, c-clamp is pushed along by green anthropomorphic rebar pieces. Although it is not as sophisticated as later sculptures, Tobolowsky connects with the viewer.

Completed six years later and on a grander scale is the large sculpture, "Wandering." Just when you feel comfortable with the formal aspect of this beautiful work, its whimsical and controlled content hits you; the wildly curving red metal, never stopping on the grid, evokes related experience. The grid could also reference a business graph; one side soaring upwards while the opposite side reflects a down-turn. The red curves suggest ephemeral movement while the metal wheels establish a corresponding physical movement. These curvilinear metal masses appear frequently in the sculptures, suggesting both physical and mental roads. As autobiographical signals, they reference his own life's path and thoughts.

Tobolowsky has gained attention for the fact that he came to the sculpture field late in life. Although he studied art at SMU, his ultimate vocation was business and law. After thirty years, he returned to art with a remarkable energy. A few of his early works are on display and reveal his early love of metal; the dates of the works document a sculptor on fast-forward.

George Tobolowsky's sculptures offer several layers of interpretation and points of view. Visit his website at: [georgetobolowsky.com](http://georgetobolowsky.com)

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