



Huitlacoche Series

SURFACE TREATMENT

With COVID-19 rebounding and slowing gallery openings, we will keep your art experiences alive by looking back at some memorable shows. Today we remember the late Richard Hyslin and his *STEELWORK* exhibition from the Kika de la Garza Art Center, August 2012

STEELWORK

Detritus from the scrap yard takes on new life through sculptures with a powerful presence.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Walking into Richard Hyslin's exhibition, *STEELWORK*, is like walking into a strange landscape; the echo of things that once existed fill the Kika de la Garza Art Center. Hyslin, along with his assistants, has created a powerful exhibition of thirty-two sculptures, most of them produced within the last month. The artist is interested in the detritus of the scrap yard, remarking that all of the materials in this show had a former life somewhere. His goal is to re-purpose the pieces of torn and bruised steel that he finds there and discover what new forms they might assume. This direction has interested him for some time, but since the destruction of the twin towers in 2001, the baroque and unexpected elements have taken on a darker meaning in his work. "The stark ruins of tortured metal, twisted and warped by fire and hatred, have influenced me," he confessed.

Many of the works are non-referential, but some of them reference ideas or experiences. Several pieces recall Glastonbury Abbey, the site of one of the largest monasteries in England before it was destroyed at the command of Henry VIII. "Glastonbury #2" appears to be the burnt remains of an arch, yet its two verticals give a sense of life to the partial structure. Hyslin said fragments of the

magnificent arches and walls moved him. The Abbey grounds have been re-purposed as the venue for large outdoor events in the same spirit that Hyslin has re-purposed his found-steel parts to represent it.

While these works evoke a feeling of desolation, others are downright poetic. "Red Cloud Nebula" is one such work. The folded steel with its roughly painted surface is dynamic; it reveals an act of becoming. This is quite the opposite from many works that express a more static and somber side.

His "Huitlacoche Series" incorporates small domes attached to geometric-like stalk forms. "This one just seemed to miss something," mused Hyslin. "We were playing with these dome ideas, then the term, huitlacoche (fungus that grows on corn) came to mind. People in Mexico make a soup from it. The kernels that get this fungus grow much larger than their normal kernel size. It's an interesting shape, so that's what I'm playing with here in this Huitlacoche Series."

"Inside-out Boxes" started from earlier wooden sculptures made several years ago having to do with territory, property, notions of possessions, and nature. Cartesian space informs the "Inside-Outside Boxes"- an exact cube or rectilinear space. However, the inside reflects nature, the natural form of the wood, not carved or altered in any way. This is the steel version of that concept showing the ghost of the square, but its cross members, the angle iron pieces that represent the natural part break from mathematical space. Hyslin commented, "Afterwards I thought they looked like cornstalks; they look like plant forms with leaves. I didn't intend that, but once we were into the piece, it was obvious that that was what was going on. Sometimes we run into an aspect like that through the process of making. I'm not averse to that. I think of these as collaborative with the material itself." The artist's love of discarded steel is his inspiration. "I'm not trying to overpower it, dominate it, or force it into some preconceived notion," he concluded.

STEELWORK's larger sculptures allow the viewer to experience art as a confrontation. These works have a powerful presence and in the larger pieces this is sometimes unsettling. They are real space-time images, not safely painted illusions.

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