

SANTA FE

**Tom Joyce: "Aftershock"  
at James Kelly Contemporary**

In the wake of recent public art commissions in NYC and Charlotte, NC, *Aftershock*, the first major Santa Fe exhibition in about a decade by preeminent local conceptual-blacksmith Tom Joyce at James Kelly Contemporary was perfectly forged, and a smashing success. The show's center of gravity was a pair of enormous steel rings, titled *Aureole I & II* (both 2015). The pure presence of these pieces is measured in tonnage, and the story they roll out, as they sit up on edge, like great big tractor wheels, is one of impactful transformation, of finding a balance between verticality and horizontality, and of shattering the strata, globally and molecularly. They read like colossal mandalas, graven in steel in an organic semiotics of nature. Beginning with 12-foot tall solid steel cylinders, Joyce began a lengthy process of heating and compressing the pieces into flattened discs while also quenching them in cold-water baths. His idea was to subject the steel to conditions something like that of metal molecules in meteors as they enter Earth's atmosphere. This literally took the steel to a point of breakdown, such that it crackled and spread, filling out with deep fissures like dried mud on the desert floor, or the charred

and scarred surface of wood burnt to charcoal. Somewhere along the way, he punched a hole in the center of each huge disc, threading the world through them. Then he stood them on end, to start the wheels turning again. Joyce's passions for purity of form while pushing metallurgic fatigue to points of technical extremity explodes here in massive, minimalist masterpieces, rich in metaphoric impact.

Joyce received a "genius grant" from the MacArthur Foundation in 2003. The rest of this (perfectly packed) show exhibits that same bright light. The motif of circularity—formally, metaphorically, and through the recycling of materials (so fundamental to the life of metals)—ripples through the various media on display. A video projection onto cast cement, and light box images of cross-section scans of the smaller iron-works on display add intriguing elements of light and color to the play of sculptural volumes and scale that keep coming full circle. Large panels of MDF composition board, beautifully burnt and branded by rings of hot metal, derived as framed drawings done during forging, and abstractly rendering macro-cosmic constellations or close-up clusters of micro-bacterial life, recall ever so slightly Charles Ross's *Year of Solar Burns*. Both artists share the same spiritual fascination with interfacing earth and astronomy. After all, iron on earth, Joyce's signature material, is elemental stuff for both stardust and steel

—JON CARVER

