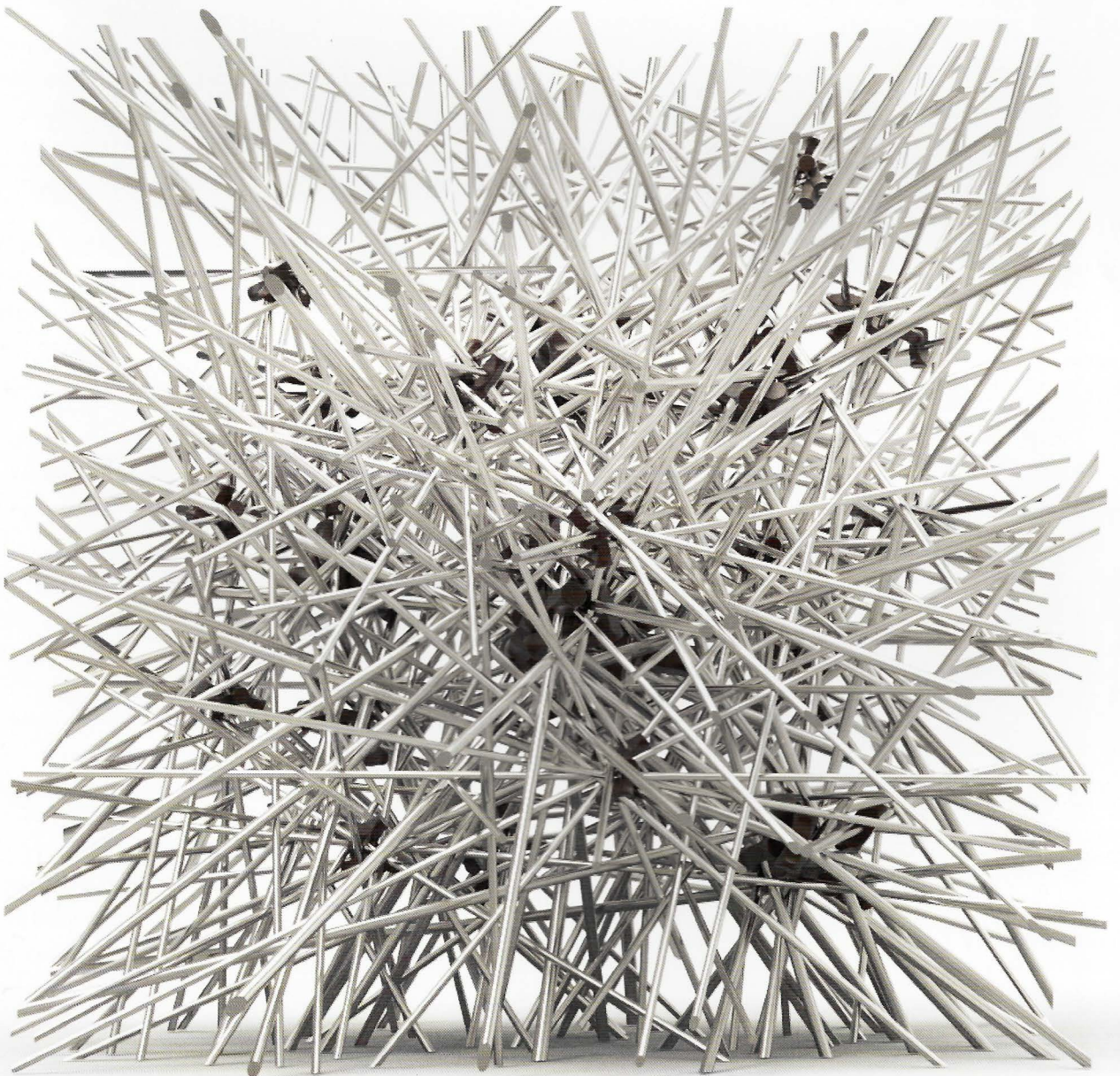


Beyond the Wall of **THE MINT MUSEUM** FALL + WINTER 2015

inspire



Ten commissions. **5 years.** One celebration.

New Tom Joyce sculpture will commemorate both history and future

By **REBECCA ELLIOT** Assistant Curator of Craft, Design, & Fashion

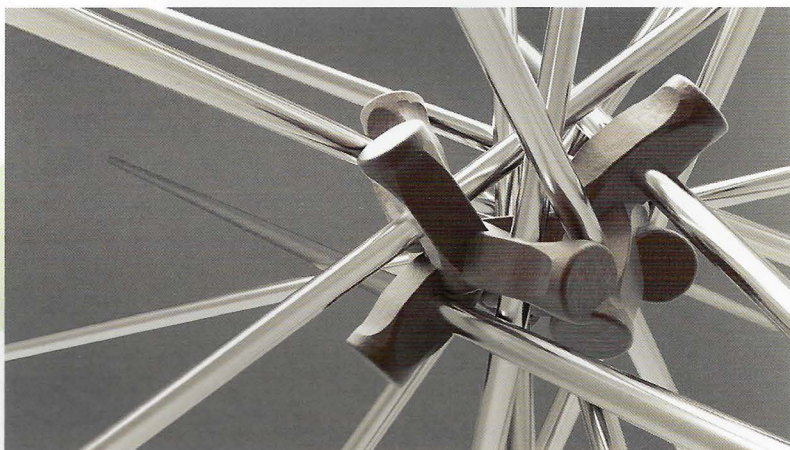
Five years ago, Mint Museum Uptown opened its doors and completed the transformation of a block of South Tryon Street into the international cultural destination known as Levine Center for the Arts.

This October, in honor of that anniversary, the Mint will celebrate a new addition to the uptown streetscape—a sculpture by renowned artist Tom Joyce on the Sally and Bill Van Allen Terrace overlooking the museum's South Tryon plaza.

The sculpture, *Thicket*, will complete Project Ten Ten Ten, a series of commissions of ten major works by leading international artists and designers in honor of the museum's opening in the tenth month of 2010.

Thicket, a seven-and-a-half-foot square block composed of stainless steel rods passing through cast iron hammer heads, is a fitting tribute to the community impact of the Mint and Levine Center for the Arts (which is also home to the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art, the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture, and Knight Theater). The abstracted hammers are a metaphor rooted in Joyce's practice as a blacksmith that began 45 years ago with an apprenticeship at age 14.

To the artist, hammers symbolize "an inherent potential embodied within all tools employed in the hands of makers. This timeless tool seemed an apt emblem with which to greet visitors and 'hammer home' The Mint Museum's mission

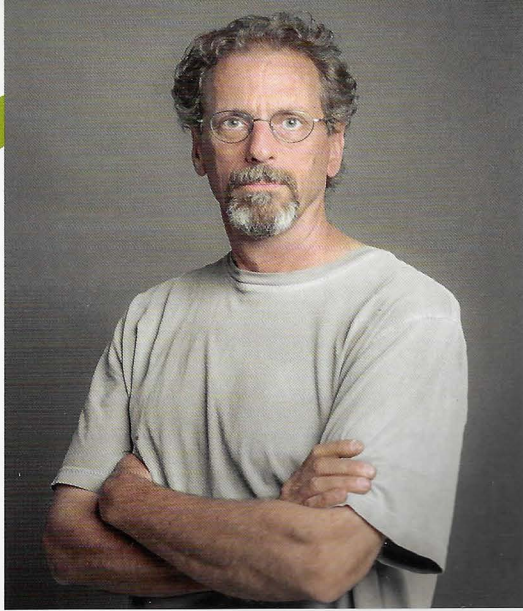


of championing all art through educational outreach to encourage creative acts of every imaginable form."

Accordingly, the sculpture is based on the hammer that Joyce uses most frequently, chosen from among the hundreds that line the walls of his studio, each shaped slightly differently to strike metal in a unique way. Cast in clusters, the hammer heads in the sculpture evoke "cells in the process of dividing" and the stainless steel rods "a kind of creative energy or life force moving out from its source in unpredictable ways."

As a teenager in New Mexico, Joyce met one of the few remaining blacksmiths in the country and was captivated by the craft and its history. After completing an apprenticeship, Joyce left high school to become a full-time blacksmith, setting up his studio in Santa Fe in 1977. He's now based in Santa Fe and Brussels, Belgium, and will travel to the Mint with an assistant to install *Thicket* in late September.

Joyce's work over the years has included repairing farm implements as well as creating sculptures ranging from tabletop-sized to monumental that have been exhibited throughout the world and collected by museums. He has



Tom Joyce. © 2014 Daniel Barsotti

completed hundreds of commissions for entities including churches, museums, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, which awarded him its prestigious five-year fellowship in 2003.

Uniting all of Joyce's endeavors is his deep interest in the history of iron and the social, political, and economic implications of working with it. Through extensive reading and close study of objects, Joyce has become an expert on historical and contemporary metalwork, particularly African blacksmithing traditions.

Informed by Joyce's deep cultural knowledge, the very substance of his sculptures embodies memories important to their communities. Throughout history, blacksmiths have continually forged old iron into new objects. As Joyce points out, blacksmiths today rarely use "virgin" iron mined directly from the earth; most iron "has lived another life."

Joyce uses this practice to imbue his sculptures with meaning. For the Catholic church of Santa Maria de la Paz in Santa Fe, Joyce forged a baptismal font in 1994 from keys, chains, and other objects of personal significance given to him by parishioners. More recently, Joyce

was commissioned by the National September 11 Memorial & Museum to forge steel from the World Trade Center into letters spelling out a phrase from Virgil's Aeneid: "No day shall erase you from the memory of time."

Thicket, generously funded by the Mint Museum Auxiliary, tangibly connected to these and other cultural memories. Its cast iron is made from a unique alloy that includes steel filings and iron grindings reserved from those commissions and nearly every other project Joyce has completed in his career, numbering in the hundreds. This metal, in turn, was often sourced from recycled objects. In the artist's words, *Thicket* carries "the ferrous 'DNA,' or in essence, the molecular 'memory'" of his life's work, and with it, the memories of individuals and cultures around the world.

Thicket also enabled Joyce to push his work in new directions. The hammer head clusters are cast in molds created by 3-D printing, marking the first time Joyce has used this process in a public art project. "Before this technology was introduced, [they] would have been all but impossible to cast using conventional foundry methods," said Joyce.

Further, the process to assemble *Thicket* is a new challenge. The steel rods will be inserted into the hammer head clusters to make individual asterisk-like forms that the artist will combine onsite into a densely packed cube. It will be his first time creating "a complicated structure that cannot be precisely determined beforehand, but must be intuitively woven together one piece at a time," he said.

"By selecting my most frequently used hammer to create a model for the 'nucleus' of each cluster," said Joyce, "I position it as a seed, poised for a future germination and as a still point at the center of an explosive potential."

Want to go?

The public is invited to view and celebrate the sculpture during a FREE community celebration the weekend of October 3 and 4. The museum will offer free admission, hands-on activities, and guided tours of the Project Ten Ten Ten commissions. See more at mintmuseum.org/happenings.