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Where Creative Heat Meets Molten Metal

By Randy Kennedy

It sometimes has the feel of the pious descending on Santiago de Compostela on St. James's Day: the hordes of weekend art pilgrims, identifiable usually by their funky glasses and carefully studied unstudied look, stepping off Metro-North trains in Beacon, N.Y., and wandering in large groups down the street to Dia:Beacon, the skylighted shrine to Minimalist and Conceptualist art that opened last year.

But not many of these art travelers are aware that about a mile north of Dia is another place where, if they were lucky, they might catch a glimpse of a beautifully twisted bench, reminiscent of a whale's tail, designed by the Iraqi-born architect Zaha Hadid -- and not just a glimpse of this work but of the work in its last stages of being born, as an artisan polished and smoothed it. Or they might walk past a looming Robert Indiana "LOVE" sculpture, made of Cor-Ten steel, that had been trucked in from Indianapolis to be saved from rust. Or tiny bronze figures, cute but slightly menacing, designed by the sculptor Tom Otterness, whose pieces were literally scattered from room to room as if they had been caught in some kind of art shootout.

Across the way, they could have seen a blood-red wax cast of Winston Churchill, slightly larger than life, that extended only from his feet to his chest. You had to look around to find Churchill's shoulders and head, a grave expression on his face, sitting on a table nearby. The effect seemed like something Andy Warhol might have done. Or more likely, Warhol would have made the life-size bronze statue of Andy Griffith and Ron Howard as a young Opie, with fishing poles in hand, standing in another room. (The piece was actually made by StudioEIS in Brooklyn and is bound for Raleigh, N.C., the headquarters of the cable channel TV Land.)



The place where these works were hiding is Tallix, a 34-year-old fine-arts foundry whose buildings and yards, sprawling over five acres, have been used over the years by dozens of artists, from the completely unknown to the hugely famous -- Roy Lichtenstein, Willem de Kooning, Jeff Koons, Nancy Graves and Claes Oldenburg -- to produce works ranging from miniature to monumental.

As the sales pitch for Tallix stresses, the foundry, one of the largest in the country, is a business and does not discriminate on the basis of either artistic merit or size. It can make pieces up to 46 feet high indoors, and virtually any size outdoors.

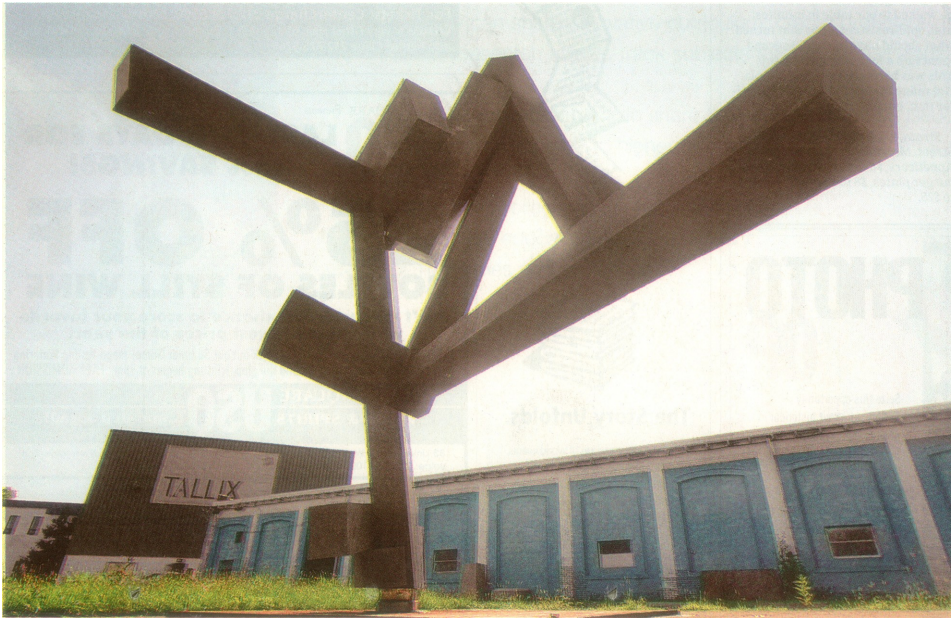


"And with the same skill and care," its Web site, Tallix.com, says, "we can also cast doorknobs, butterflies or the reins for miniature racehorses."

Granted, getting in to see any of these works-in-progress is not nearly as easy as it is at Dia:Beacon. Tours are by appointment only on Tuesday through Thursday mornings, and there is no real way to tell whether you will get to see a Julian Schnabel piece being

restored or spend the morning looking mostly at expensive reproductions of Beaux Arts birdbaths bound for the backyards of the wealthy. But the chances are good that you will see at least something great, and it is more than worth taking the chance.

Spending a day roaming around Tallix (the name is a play on the word metallics) is a little like going to a museum exhibition organized by an art-loving anarchists' cell. One recent morning, on a guided tour provided by Meredith L. Roedel, the foundry's director of restoration and special projects, the sights included a huge Joel Shapiro sculpture stretching its beams like arms into the sunlight in a yard outside the foundry.

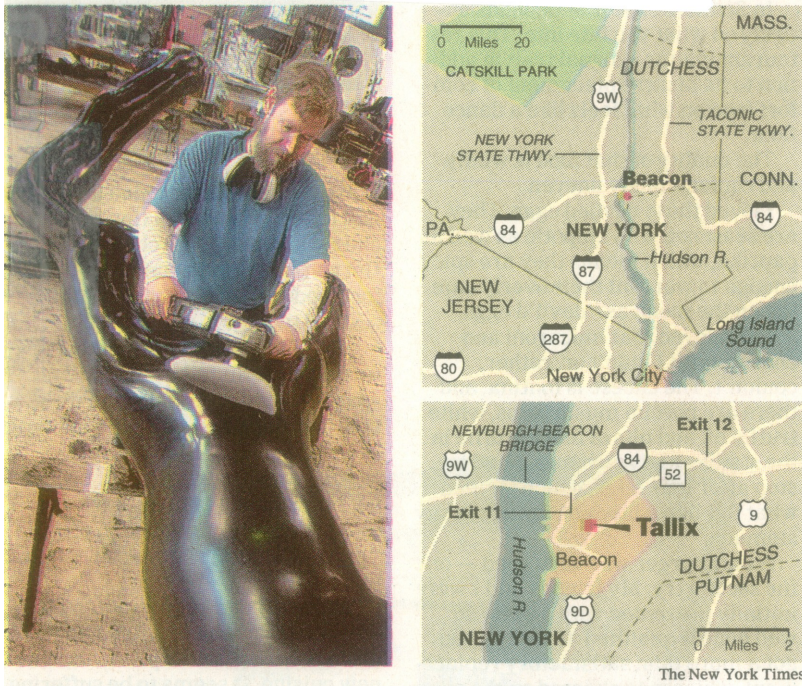


Inside the barns, where workers were casting sculptures, pouring bronze into forms and polishing finished products, there was a stainless-steel work by George Condo, polished to an almost mirror shine, that spelled out the name Miles Davis in enormous block letters. A few rooms away, a clay cast of Thomas M. Whalen III, the mayor of Albany who died two years ago, sat almost lifelike on a bench, his hand petting a clay dog. Oddly, the figure of Mr. Whalen was dressed in a disheveled business suit, which would be used to cast him in a more realistic manner.

Nearby, David Frech, a traditional figurative sculptor, was working on a plastilene clay version of a majestic-looking woman cradling an infant. After this sculpture is cast in bronze, it will be installed in the fall at the Lovett Memorial Library in Pampa, Tex., to honor the hardy spirit of the pioneer women on the Great Plains.

As Mr. Frech worked, wearing earphones to isolate him from the bustle around him, he glanced over at Ms. Roedel and focused on her hair, which was pinned up. "Good hair today," he said, glancing back at his figure, whose hair was also swept up. "I may have to use you as a model later."

That kind of easy collaboration between art and business has been a hallmark of Tallix since its founding in 1970 in a garage in Peekskill, N.Y. (The foundry moved to Beacon in 1986.) Vincent Nardone, the vice president for sales, said he remembered when Graves, a prolific artist, would wander in with gourds or beans and ask if there were a way to have them cast. "Once she came in with sardines," he said, laughing. "It was incredible."



"Tallix was just kind of a word-of-mouth thing that happened, and kept growing," he added. "We just try to do what artists need done."

In fact, the foundry, whose handiwork can be found in public places from Washington to London to Moscow to the New York subway, will do almost anything short of breaking the law to help artists realize their dreams. It is now expanding into architectural metals. (The widely praised bronze facade of the American Folk Art Museum in Manhattan was made by Tallix.)

Peter Homestead, a sales representative for the foundry, said it recently took on a project to make a steel plate three stories high that the architect Michael Baird will bolt onto the front of a new single-family house he is building in the West Village.

To get the plate into the city, Mr. Homestead added, "we'll have to close down the George Washington Bridge for about three hours in the middle of the night." "It's going to be something," he said.

Mr. Nardone said the recession had hit the business particularly hard in recent years. "Even private collectors are being very careful about what they're spending," he said, adding, "You need to be optimistic to buy art." He also said that despite the crowds of art lovers, artists and patrons, the presence of Dia:Beacon down the road has not translated into much more work for the foundry.

"It hasn't been overwhelming," he said. "We're actually hoping it starts to go that way." But projects are beginning to increase again, and the foundry is being sought out by more architects who have Frank Gehry-like visions of cladding their buildings in metal.



To the casual visitor, it certainly looks as if the foundry is running on all cylinders. The other day, Churchill was coming together, and one worker was finishing an Otterness dismembered foot, while others were working on statues of everyone from Don Quixote to the founder of Vassar College.

The show-stoppers, though, were pieces of a massive, leggy sculpture by Larry Bell that, disassembled, looked like the distended trunks of some kind of sinister tree. When put together, it will rise 30 feet into the air in front of an office building in Hong Kong, and a small team of workers were swarming around it to make sure that it gets there on time.

"We've got all hands on deck here," Ms. Roedel said. "It's a big one."

How to Visit An Art Foundry

The Tallix art foundry is at 310 Fishkill Avenue, Beacon, N.Y. Tours for groups of eight or more (40 is the maximum) are available mornings, Tuesdays through Thursdays, beginning at 10:30. The fee is \$15 a person; \$12.50 for ages 65+ and students. To reach the foundry from Manhattan, take the New York State Thruway to Route 84 (Newburgh-Beacon Bridge); continue over the bridge to Exit 12 (Fishkill Avenue) and make a right onto Fishkill Avenue; continue about three miles to the foundry. Information: (800) 682-5549.

Correction: August 17, 2004, Tuesday An article in Weekend on Friday about the Tallix fine-arts foundry in Beacon, N.Y., misstated the North Carolina destination of a statue of Andy Griffith and Ron Howard. The statue is a gift from the cable-channel TV Land to Mount Airy, not to Raleigh. The article also misstated the location of the headquarters of TV Land. It is New York City, not Raleigh.

CAPTIONS: Photos: At the Tallix foundry in Beacon, N.Y., LeRoy Fox works on a foot for Tom Otterness's "Gulliver" sculpture. Left, Mr. Otterness's "Big, Big Penny," also at the foundry. (Photographs by Librado Romero/The New York Times)(pg. E29); Clockwise from above: David Frech at Tallix, working on his figure of a prairie woman, destined for a library in Texas; "Urban Francis," a sculpture by Judith Shea; a section of Larry Bell's "Happy Man," being waxed; "Don Quixote" (foreground) by Izhar Patkim; and an untitled piece by Joel Shapiro standing in the yard outside the foundry. (Photographs by Librado Romero/The New York Times)(pg. E36)

Map of New York state highlighting the location of Tallix. (pg. E36)