

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Review: Artists draw on fire loss for exhibit

By Kurt Shaw
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On Jan. 17, Pittsburgh artists Carley Jean and Ed Parrish witnessed their Etna home and studio burn to the ground.

Known as the founders of the popular "Hot Metal Happening" performance events in which artists make iron from raw materials and cast it into art in front of curious eyes, the couple is not adverse to fire and flame. But here, recognizing a total loss, things were different.

Never mind that the pair had been working on new pieces to display in "Hot Metal," a new exhibition organized by Ed Parrish and planned for the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust's largest Downtown gallery SPACE. With no insurance, the Parrishes are now hard at work rebuilding their lives. But they did manage to pull together that art exhibition. The show must go on as they say. And they even managed to put their own work in it, though quite a bit different than planned.

Witness "Shadows of a Place We Knew and Together We Move Through." An installation made of metal banding; bronze, aluminum and iron castings; powdered graphite; and a burnt and charred wood pattern salvaged from an old steel mill, it's the Parrishes' attempt to make sense of it all.

"My wife and I were both planning on having our work in the show, but most of what we were working on got destroyed (in the fire)," Ed Parrish says. "So, these are parts that we scavenged from our studio. Then, a week after the fire, which kept us up all night, we just stayed up all night down here and built this through the course of the night."

So devastated, Carley Jean Parrish could barely muster any more effort. Her "Extensions" is sad and poignant commentary, being simply a wad of melted extension chords hung on a hook near the entrance to the gallery.

But Ed Parrish managed to make the most of it, presenting two of his abstract, otherworldly cast-iron sculptures. Pale gray, raw iron, they are not the usual brightly colored pieces one would expect of this well-known and highly regarded local sculptor.

"These were things that I was able to dig out from under the roof and other debris. So, I just sandblasted them," he says.

They are beautiful, just the same.

In a town known for its legacy wrought in iron and steel, Ed Parrish is the last pied piper of iron. So it is that there are many works in cast iron by friends and associates on display.

Michael Walsh shows two remarkably fluid abstractions made of the stuff. Pati Beachley gives us three carpet samples, all cast in iron. And Gavin Kenyon has pushed casting to the limit with his massive cast-iron axe and sword titled "Draw." So big, they tower over many visitors, making for something quite amazing.

Other works in steel abound. They range from the delicate, such as a wheelbarrow cut into lace by Cal Lane, to the divine, as in a hand-tooled cross by Ukrainian metalsmith Oleh Bonkovikyy.

And there are a few lighthearted pieces among them to help take the gloom out of the room.

For example, "Feed Me," Glen S. Gardner's retro robot, is sure to delight fans of 1950s sci-fi flicks, and Gary Smith's supervillains made of tin foil are a fourth-grader's dreams come true.

And who wouldn't find Joey Hays' piece "You Make Me Sick" to be absolutely hilarious? Basically a grown up version of a Sit-'N-Spin that looks more like gym equipment, one sits on it and spins, all the while looking at oneself in a large mirror that cannot be avoided in the center of the contraption.

But the Parrishes' plight is not to be overlooked. It is a sad state of affairs for anyone to have suffered such loss. Our homes are our castles, lest we forget. Perhaps one piece alludes to that above all others, and that is "104-39 116th St., Queens" by Michael Dominick.

Basically an assemblage sculpture made of three radiators salvaged from the address in the title of the piece (and cast in a nameplate on a boiler at the base), it is a subtle reminder of the importance of place, our relationships to and with our homes, and how that comes to define us.

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