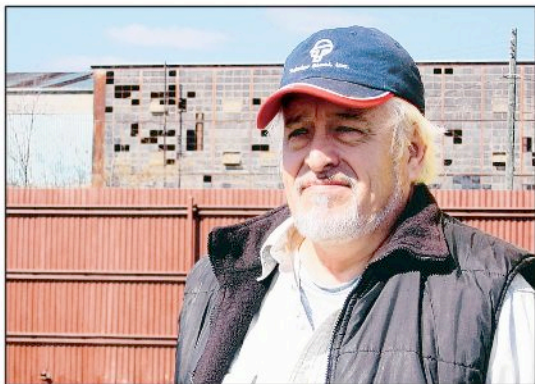


NORTH RIVER AREA ARTS



John Henry's studio is more like a campus — he has over 100,000 sq. ft. and lives on the premises.

PHOTO BY CARI GERVIN

Steel (and aluminum) drives John Henry

BY CARI GERVIN

COMMUNITY NEWS WRITER

When you turn off Main Street, you see it. Big, bright and yellow, it rises like a modern-day lighthouse, guiding you to the massive studio (and home) of John Henry.

Like the famed legend of folklore, Mr. Henry is a steel-driving man. But his steel goes not to the railroads but to the art world. His steel is often painted and frequently massive in scale, like the 101-foot, 600-ton sculpture, "Tatlin's Sentinel," that steers you toward his gate.

Chances are, you've seen Mr. Henry's works — at the entrance to Chattanooga State Technical Community College, in the River Gallery Sculpture Garden, at the Hunter Museum of American Art. But Mr. Henry is hardly just another local sculptor.

He has had installations in Chicago and Washington D.C.; Seoul, Korea; Berlin and Hamburg, Germany; and Shenzhen, China. His sculptures are in the collections of the British Museum in London, England; the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago; the Dallas Museum of Art; the Smithsonian Institution and Library of Congress in D.C.; and the Sonje Museum of Contemporary Art in Kyongju City, Korea.

Currently Mr. Henry has a sculpture in the 18-month inaugural Vancouver Sculpture Biennale. By the time summer is over, he will have flown to Europe three times to install three different pieces.

Mr. Henry just moved to Chattanooga from Chicago five years ago, attracted by the vibrant art scene and the strong industrial base. He grew up in Kentucky and still has one studio there, as well as a studio in Miami, Fla.

His studio here is on several lots on the Southside and totals over 100,000 sq. ft. Although Mr. Henry lives on the premises with his family, one might be forgiven for assuming the land is a factory instead of a home.

IF YOU GO

■ John Henry will give a lecture on sculpture tomorrow, March 16, at 7 p.m. at The Gallery located in Red Bank at 3918 Dayton Blvd. For more information, call 870-2442.

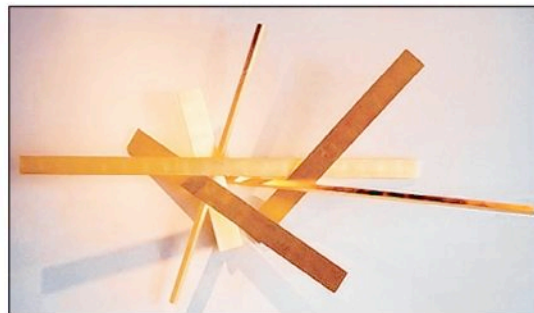
When he gave up painting for sculpture 30 years ago, Mr. Henry began working with larger and larger pieces of metal. He now employs seven full-time workers to assist with welding and assembly and clerical logistics, like transportation.

A sculpture like "Tatlin's Sentinel," Mr. Henry said, would fit in two trailers and would be shipped by truck and then freighters across the sea. He would follow the work to Italy or wherever it was going and install it over a several-day period, often operating the crane himself.

Not all of Mr. Henry's pieces are so large, of course. Many are designed for gardens, walls or floors — and

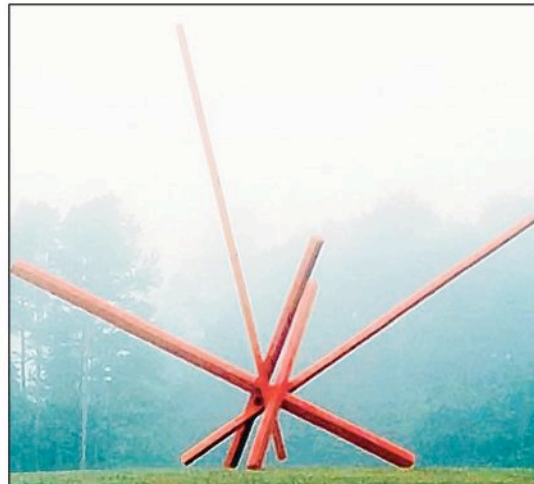
“A work of visual art is nothing but a visual symphony.”

John Henry



"Golden Hine," 1998, 4'h x 1'd x 6'8"w, machined aluminum, private collection.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



"Santa Fe Moon," 1996, 25'h x 30'l x 13'w, machined/welded aluminum, private collection.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



"Grete," 2003, 2'6"h x 5'4"w x 2'd, solid steel.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

many of the smaller works are made out of aluminum.

His sculptures are all linear explorations of the dynamics of space and gravity. Mr. Henry said his works are all formalist, exploring issues of design problems and structural feasibility.

"I enjoy the conceptual process and the challenge of the engineering. And I actually enjoy the physical work — some of it," Mr. Henry laughed. "But we have fun."

Mr. Henry teaches occasionally at Chattanooga State and is the curator of its outdoor sculpture garden. Through his work there, he has found students that he mentors, students that he hires to help in his studio, and students like Barbara Brogdon, who have become friends.

Mrs. Brogdon, the owner of Red Bank's new art gallery, has persuaded Mr. Henry to give a lecture. He will talk about sculpture on Thursday at The Gallery, where one or two of his works are also currently on display.

When asked what he planned to discuss, Mr. Henry launched into a passionate defense of the artist's role in society.

"If you closely examine what artists do over a period of history, you can establish a direct relationship between art and the culture it influences," Mr. Henry said. "We don't remember how many loaves a baker baked, or who ate that bread ... but we're aware of the design of how cultures lived and the art they created."

Mr. Henry said our American society has a lack of appreciation for the visual arts, whereas music is not judged in the same, sometimes harsh, manner.

"It's all the same," Mr. Henry said. "A work of visual art is nothing but a visual symphony."

E-mail Cari Gervin at cgervin@tjpccommunitynews.com