

Meta-Formation: Experiments and Rituals

Rachel David

with essay contributions by:

Monica Coyne

Jeffrey Funk

Daniel Miller

Patrick Quinn

Jurors: Andy Cooperman, Sarah Darro and Hoss Haley

Self published: DIY or DIE

2019

Meta-Formation: Experiments and Rituals

Copyright ©2019 by Rachel David

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review or scholarly journal.

First Printing: 2019

ISBN 978-0-359-16969-6

Red Metal 1245 St. Bernard Ave, New Orleans, LA 70116
www.redmetal.net, info@redmetal.net 504-452-8288

ordering information:

discounts are available on quantity purchases

for details contact publisher above

Juror Considerations

The Contemporary Blacksmith Re-Examined ***Sarah Darro***



Left to right: Johannes Postlmayr, “Distorted Geometric N°4,” 2017 & “Distorted Geometric N°1,” 2017

Forged objects materially encapsulate the hammer blows, flows of white-hot plasticity, and performative movement of the making process. They possess the potential to engage with the viewer in a significant way. By visually suspending the movement, force, and pressure enacted by the maker into the metal, they draw the viewer’s eye into the process. Almost like viewing a frame of stop motion in the round, the mind’s eye is compelled to visually conjure the processual before and the prospective after, even in its most refined and formal expressions. Forged metal’s material potential to act as an agent of engagement, to reach back to the viewer, is what fascinates me, as a scholar of contemporary craft and design, and excites me about the future of the field and the medium.

Meta-Formation: Experiments and Rituals

It has been an incredible honor to be involved in the jurying process of *Meta-Formation: Experiments and Rituals*, a timely and imperative survey exhibition of contemporary forged metalwork. Media-specific surveys of this kind have historically functioned to gauge the temperature of the field and its makers at a particular moment, documenting the major shifts as well as working towards advancing critical scholarship and discourse. This exhibition marks a formative moment for the field, one that is characterized by work that embraces the substantial history and traditions of iron and steel, yet forges beyond it, allowing for unprecedented conceptual expression.

In *Meta-Formations*, abstract, inflated steel sculptures are shown alongside finely wrought gardening tools while raised mokume vessels, with their intricate, layered knots of patterning, are displayed alongside steel and copper animal masks with articulated jaws. The diverse expressions in the selection are united, of course by their exacting craftsmanship and demonstration of technical skill, but also by their emphasis on material exploration.

In the December 1970 issue of *Craft Horizons* magazine, Ronald Pearson published an article entitled, "The Contemporary Blacksmith: 1970," which addressed the state of the field during the height of the studio craft movement. The article used a contemporaneous exhibition, *The Iron Show*, organized by Shop One in Rochester, as a lens to analyze contemporary blacksmithing at the time. The show consisted of decorative functional works as well as significant examples of sculptural experimentation by artists like Albert Paley. Interestingly, many of the same material considerations and drives to unite concept and form that were discussed still ring true today. The article states, "the plasticity of white hot iron invites spontaneity - a kind of direct action between man, fire, hammer, and metal. It is an elemental relationship of muscle and eye to material and form...I am learning that the finished work may or may not possess an illusion of plasticity, and that one's approach to working the material can be either plastic or rigid." Both Johannes Postlmayr's *Distorted Geometric Series* and Joshua Goss's *Ductile Compression* series in *Meta-Formations* have advanced that conversation, liminally inhabiting the spaces between design and improvisation, rigidity and plasticity - all while foregrounding concept.



Left to right: Joshua Goss, “Ductile Compression 24 (detail),” 2017 & “Ductile Compression 10,” 2015

In Postlmayr’s *Distorted Geometric* series, refined surfaces with milled angular lines and patterns cut into them are brought under the immense force of the hydraulic press, often with unpredictable results. He sets methodological design conditions initially (predetermining the depth and angles of the intersecting cuts, for example) but allows for spontaneity and improvisation in the final expression of form, with surfaces folding in, shapes jutting outward and chasms widening, revealing a more organic interior composition. These sculptural objects are entrancing, allowing the viewer to engage with the cognitive exercise of restaging the before, the process that led to the object, in their mind’s eye. Similarly performative and gestural, yet refined, are the works in Goss’s *Ductile Compression* series.

The striated, tectonic waves of Goss’s steel, iron, and bronze sculptures both symbolically reference geological formations and processes as well as materially embody them. His blacksmithing process is inherently and conceptually linked to the composition of the earth and the geological processes of forging, orogeny, compression, uplift and faulting that results from pressure, collision, and heat over many millions of years, but he also performatively re-enacts it in a condensed period of time. The artist

Meta-Formation: Experiments and Rituals

states, “through my sculpture I seek to relate the sublime nature of geological time to the human perception.” Goss fluxes and compresses layers of metal together with a hydraulic press horizontally and then, like Postlmayer’s geometric milled cuts, he creates fault lines in the merged surface with a bandsaw. In the final stage of performative making, he applies vertical compression, uplifting and bending the cut sections into gestural topography.



Left to right: Andrew Hayes, “Section,” 2018 & “Chevron,” 2017

A departure, in many ways, from the plasticity and improvisation of the two aforementioned series, Andrew Hayes’ pieces, *Section* and *Chevron* instead demonstrate meticulous control and distilled formalism. The sculptures unite forged steel armatures with layers of paper from books. An elegant material study, the contemplative works allow viewers to assess the seemingly opposing materials. The supple paper yields to the steel structures, taking on an almost liquid visual quality, flowing through the metal. The materials stand to be diametrically opposed; steel associated with endurance and strength, and paper associated with ephemerality and fragility. And yet, brought together in this refined context, Hayes mines their similarities, their ability to be flexible in certain contexts, yet massive and dense in others.



Left to right: Stephen Yusko, "Continental Divide," 2018 & "Reliquary: Solitude," 2017

Another refined sculptural expression of steel, incorporating bent wood and glass, is the figurative work of Stephen Yusko. His nostalgic and contemplative pieces, *Continental Divide* and *Reliquary: Solitude*, render industrial architectural forms, like factory buildings, in the very materials that both compose those spaces and are produced by them. Making the conceptual foundations of his works even more nuanced and potent is the incorporation of reconstituted steel sourced from industrial scrap yards and farm sales in his work. Yusko demonstrates a keen awareness and fascination with the social and industrial fabric, history, physical trajectories, and object lives of his materials.

The selection of works in *Meta-Formation: Experiments and Rituals* represents a contemporary field of blacksmithing that is rich with material innovation and is driven as much by process and tradition as by conceptual concerns. Exactingly crafted forged metalwork seems increasingly rarefied in and significant for a contemporary culture that is often detached from makers and the provenance of the materials and

Meta-Formation: Experiments and Rituals

objects of our experiences. I am invigorated by forged metal's potential for agency and engagement and after assessing this work I eagerly anticipate the next leaps in contemporary blacksmithing – a future field that I envision is enriched by interdisciplinary exploration, time-based and post-object expressions, and an increasingly intersectional community of thinkers and makers.
