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BY Carol Chaffin

artist profile

A Lesson in Kindling: Segal Unites Wood, Metal and A Quest For the Soul.

When you look at a Joe Segal sculpture, you see the joining together of natural and man-made materials. But what you learn from observing it is that it is also a man-made attempt at getting to the heart of nature.

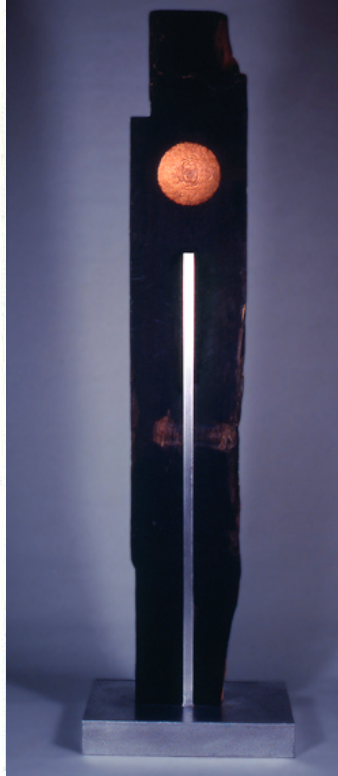
Like uncovering the true person by the way he or she handles adversity, Segal strips away the surface of his favorite medium — wood, with such severe means as shredding, charring, burning, scorching, splitting and cutting. His intention is not to express violence or to expose the sinister, but to reveal the beauty of the wood by how it responds to these impositions on its original state.

And in the process, it is an exercise in discovering the motivation driving the artist behind it.

"The whole thing is a soul-searching process," says Segal. "Is it an exercise in vanity or am I really looking for something?"

Segal, who graduated *magna cum laude* from Flagler College with a BA in visual arts, studied with renowned sculptor Enzo Torcoletti and apprenticed with Murray Schlam in New York. His work has been exhibited in a variety of galleries in St. Augustine, as well as in Studio 501 in New York City and the Jacksonville Museum of Contemporary Art.

His work is beautiful in its meaning and in its compromised state, but it is not pretty. It's purpose...to tell a story



"Follower" Part of the Forbes Magazine Art Collection in New York City

about the wood. To create a more intriguing aspect to the work, Segal employs aluminum in his sculptures, using it to add mystery and a coldness to the warmth suggested by the burnt wood forms. The element of cold aluminum creates questions about imposition.

"What is this cold aluminum form doing? Is it supporting the piece? Is it shaping the piece? Is it cutting the piece in half? That's pretty much it," says Segal. "A reminder that the human touch is often a need for order and function. I hope that its presence asks questions."

In his pieces "*Kouros*," "*Believer*," "*Follower*," and "*Gift*," the metal supports the wood, providing a buffer between it and the table surface. Other works, such as "*Ground*," "*Root*," "*Equator II*," and "*Time I*," are split through the middle by the metal. Segal uses linear shapes, which he says connotes the hard and graphic; circles, which represent the organic; and the ellipse, which he calls the perfect form because it is a union of the two. "*Time I*" and "*Root*" are both elliptical shapes.

To many people, a piece of wood is simply a piece of wood. To Joe Segal, it is a work of art in progress. And in that, opportunity to grow as an artist.

"I think the most important part of being a sculptor," says Segal, "is the ability to realize your ideas." ●