

IRON man

by Jacqueline M. Duda



Daniel Stuart

As a young man, Silver Spring artist Daniel Stuart's imagination thrived on the lore of medieval knights and dragons. In high school, he did a great deal of drawing and painting. His father owned a welding business in Damascus.

As he grew older, Stuart wanted to create something with some weight to it—a piece of artwork that people could hold in their hands. His imagination, love of drawing and some welding courses eventually forged into a process of developing one-of-a-kind metal sculptures.

InSight: *What interests you most about working with metal?*

Stuart: There's something magical about pulling the iron out of the fire. The sparks are flying. I can take something that's so hard and so tough initially and turn it into something dynamic and moving. It's neat to work with it.

InSight: *How did you get started?*

Stuart: After I graduated from Damascus High School, the only thing I was sure of was that I was tired of school. I think it depends on the school and the era when a person attends. But for me, the way they taught catered to a certain style of learning. It didn't gel with my learning style. I always wanted to know: "How am I going to use this in real life?" So, at first I worked in video television production at Montgomery County Television, and then helped to launch a new audiovisual program at Blake High School. One of the guys taking a course at MCT was a farrier. He made horseshoes. Turns out, I had a vice (a blacksmith tool) that needed to get fixed. It was bent at a crazy angle and he fixed it for me—banged it straight out. I went to the Sugarloaf Craft Festival and talked to Tom Boone,

Artists Among Us

Falling Water is one of Dan's many decorative wall hangings where the image inside the frame is protruding from the wall. All the colors are brought out using heat and polish then coated with a clear lacquer for protection.

welder extraordinaire. That inspired me to take some basic blacksmithing classes at the Carroll County Farm Museum in Westminster. I eventually set up shop in the garage my dad used for his welding business. I've been working with metal full-time now for the last three years.

InSight: *How has your work evolved?*

Stuart: I don't refer to myself as a blacksmith. I've evolved into a metal sculptor who uses blacksmithing techniques. No old-world traditional tools. I don't mind making something look like it's riveted when it's not. Most people don't care about that. It's more the message I put across in my work. It's well done, clean and detailed. I used to love wandering through the scrap yards—I was like a kid in a candy store. By the time I started metal sculpting, Dad had already sold a lot of his tools. The welding machine was gone. So I started doing gas welding in the beginning. I used torches to cut the metal and put a different nozzle on the torch to make various cuts. It's tedious, like stitching fabric with needle and thread. I had to hold the torch in one hand and a piece of metal rod in the other. The whole thing gets really hot. The heat permeates your glasses. I caught the table on fire a couple times (laughs).





This table, titled *Under the Sea*, was constructed to hold a slab of fossilized coral. It is made of rusted and pitted pipe with forged steel coral life attached to it.

InSight: *Can you describe some of your best work?*

Stuart: I recently did a large map of the world for NAI Global, a large real estate company, for their corporate office in New Jersey. It's four feet by six feet, and all different colors. Most of my work is done in a natural color—polished steel that looks like silver. When you heat metal it brings out the different colors. I made the drier regions of the world yellow, and the colder regions blue. I lifted the continents off the water and put blue neon behind it so it would radiate a bluish glow. I've also done some large mirrors for a hotel at Dulles, and a table for myself that seats 12 people. It has bamboo in the center coming up out of the glass.

InSight: *How has your experience and your imagination shaped your work?*

Stuart: I'm mostly self-taught, other than the basic classes. I like to play with metal. The more I play with it, the more I see. It doesn't take much to spark my imagination. I see things and imagine them being much bigger. I forge some metal and twist it just to see what else it will do. I finish one project and start on another. My work just keeps progressing. Most of my work is one-of-a-kind, except for some of the smaller pieces. I try to communicate my findings about myself and the universe in my sculptures. We're all connected. It's more than quantum physics, there's a consciousness here that's more than meets the eye. If you look at my work, a lot of things are

breaking open from still shapes. The energy is pouring out. It's a life energy coming out of something that might otherwise be stagnant.

Daniel Stuart's work can be viewed online at www.ironantlerforge.com. The artist can be reached at daniel@ironantlerforge.com or 301-787-1880.

Daniel Stuart's work will appear at the Sugarloaf Crafts Festival in Gaithersburg on October 10th, 11th, and 12th. For further information, go online to: www.sugarloafcrafts.com/festivals/gaith/october/