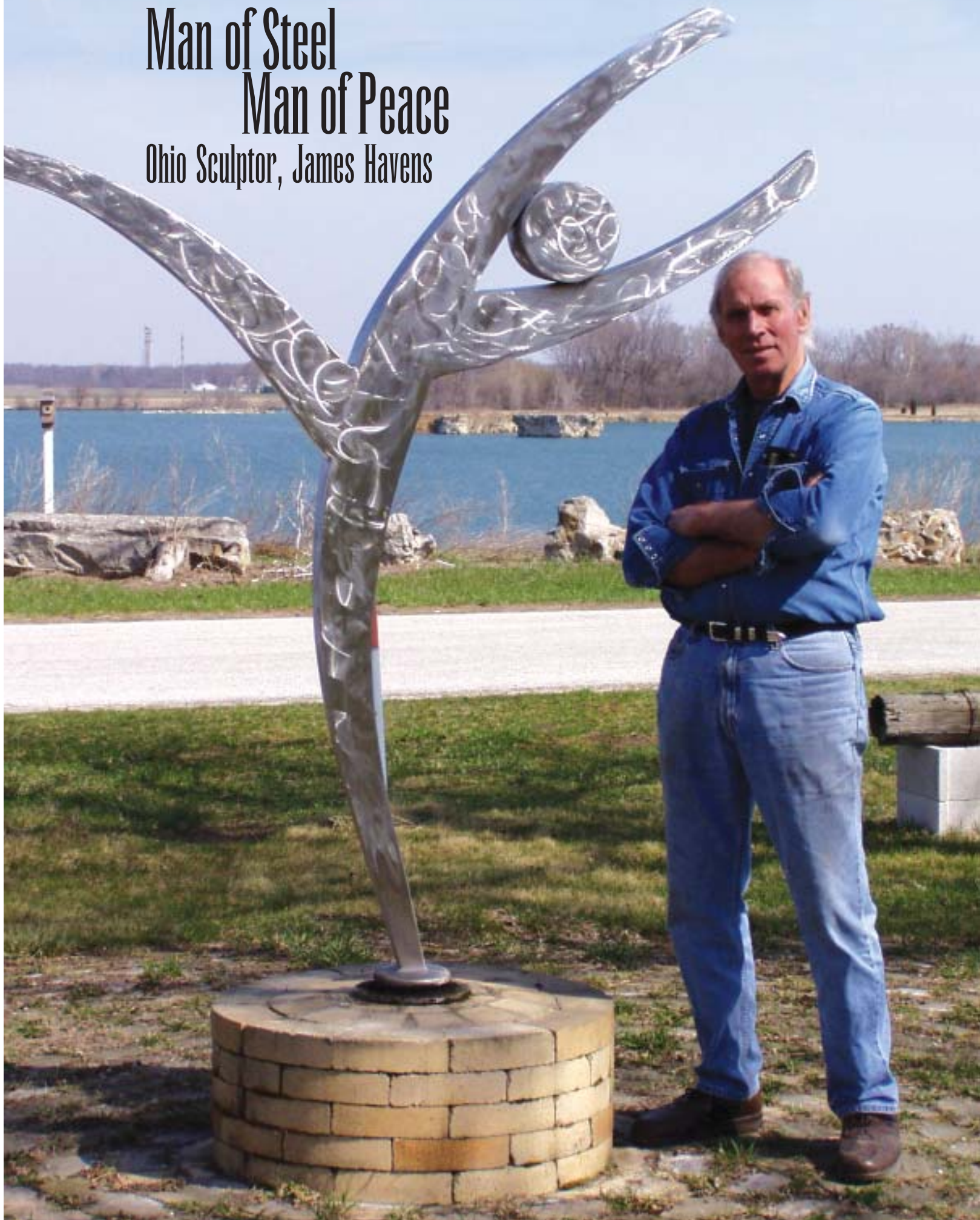


Man of Steel Man of Peace

Ohio Sculptor, James Havens



by David Seth Brass

James Havens became motivated to teach himself to sculpt in stainless steel after stepping into the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1965 and viewing a stainless steel sculpture by David Smith. Havens considers Smith to have been a pioneer in the history of American welded sculpture.

Havens was born in Peekskill, New York, in 1938. By the time he was two years old, he had already completed four round trips between New York and California. With a father who had a well established reputation in the construction industry, travel was bound to define the kind of person Havens would one day become.

“I’d had a somewhat varied education, starting in California and moving on to Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Kentucky, Idaho, Wyoming, New York, and Illinois, finishing with three years at a missionary school in the Himalayas of Uttar Pradesh, India.

“A week after I graduated, I got a job on the St. Lawrence as a welder’s helper. When the winter lay-offs came, I joined the Marine Corps. By the fall of 1958 I was in Beirut and then throughout the Mediterranean. Wherever the Marines took me, it was the same as when I’d been with my Father; the world was a wondrous place to see. Whether it was North America, Europe, the Middle East or Asia, the creations of God and man were wondrous. To go to these places and find that there was more, more and still more, then I knew it would be a good thing to build and create. It did not have to be big like a cathedral; it could be small and within the capabilities of one man. The most important thing was that it be done well, for that was the common denominator of all that I liked.”

Discussing the time in his life that he acknowledged his artistic capabilities, Havens explained that he always felt creative impulses and has always been a reader. He thought he wanted to be the next Ernest Hemingway. To determine if the direction he was meant to take was in writing, he sent out submissions to publications, which surprised his wife Karen. After receiving many rejections and viewing David Smith’s sculpture at the museum, destiny and desire directed Havens into the visual arts.

“I knew a little about welding. My Dad had taught me to use his welding machine when I was in the second grade. I had tried three different colleges already and I wasn’t going back to school. I knew I needed to learn more about welding and about metal.

“In 1967 I joined the International Association of Bridge, Structural and Ornamental Ironworkers’ Union. I then followed work in auto plants, coal-burning power houses, nuclear plants, high-rises, factories, shipyards, wherever steel construction was needed. During this time, the need to improve my welding was apparent, so I went to the Lincoln Welding School in Cleveland, Ohio and became a certified pipe and plate welder. In the mid 1970s, friends and I started a steel fabrication and erection company, but by 1983 this became so demanding that I was, to some extent, losing sight of my goals and decided to put it aside.”

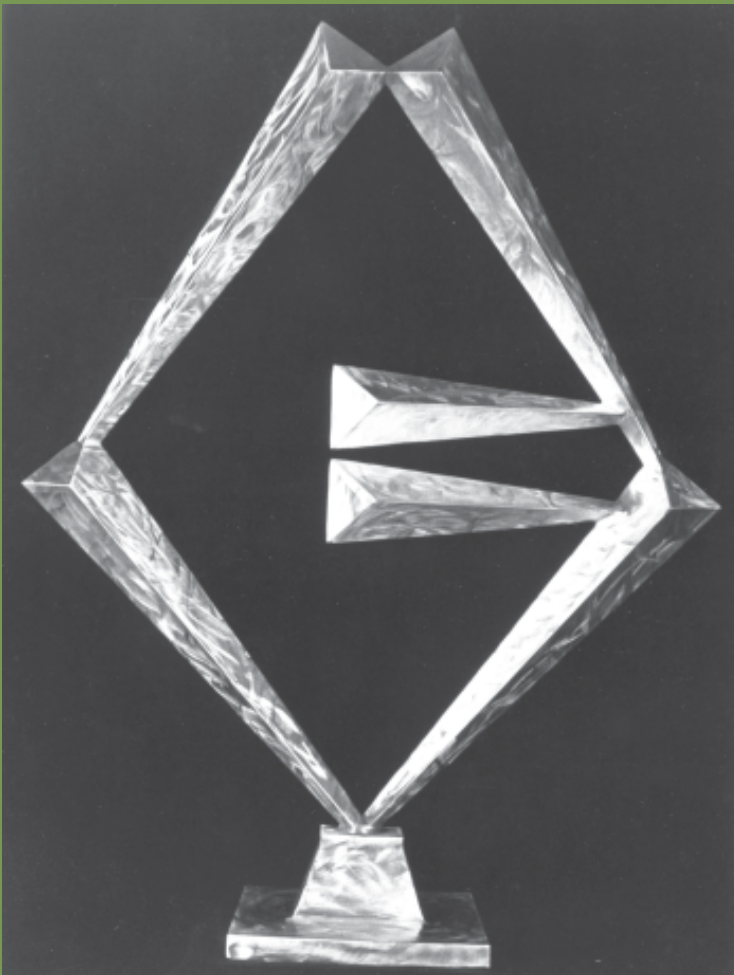


Facing Page:
Artist with *DANCER II*
Above:
GHANDI
Clay Potrait in Process

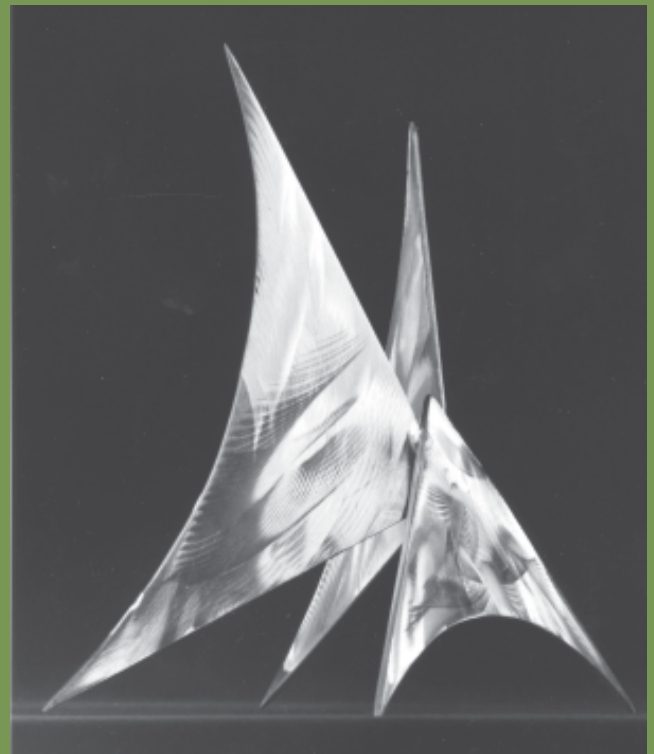


Havens talked about Jim Davis, a co-worker and friend for whom he had a high regard. "He was a wonderful man, very knowledgeable. People don't realize how much you can learn by working one on one with a person who is a very capable craftsman. I worked with him day in and day out. You talk about small classrooms, one instructor and one student. You can pick up an immense amount of knowledge if that is what you want to do." Havens would spend up to twelve hours a day with Davis. During work time, meals, and coffee breaks, they always talked about ironwork. Havens felt bad that it wasn't possible to bottle up the wealth of knowledge that Davis and others had accumulated.

The sculptor takes great pleasure from his work as an art and welding instructor at Owens Technical College, located in Ohio. Many of his students repeat his classes to learn what he has attained through his association with professional iron workers. Havens described how one of his students was frustrated and unable to begin a welded sculpture project. He told her, "You are



From Top:
Artist with *CONTINUITY OF SPACE IN TIME*
62" x 60" x 30"
PEACE
89" x 69" x 29"
THREE ARCS WITH EQUAL RADII
67" x 65" x 45"



“ Art is not mathematics; it is not spelling; it is not one of these empirical things. This is something that is intuitive, and you just take it and do it.”

trying to think too much about art. Art is not mathematics; it is not spelling; it is not one of these empirical things. This is something that is intuitive, and you just take it and do it. Put your hands on it and start doing it. You don't have to have an idea; just pick up the torch; pick up the welding machine; take two pieces of metal, and start putting them together. Don't even think about not knowing what you are going to do; just do something and something will come out of it.” Havens said that each time she followed his advice, it worked. She began, first believing in him, and then by developing confidence in her own skills.

Havens talked about when he actively began pursuing sculpting and about his early work. “In 1970 I'd made my first sculpture that met with acceptance. The piece was a fourteen foot tall Cor-ten and stainless steel sculpture of the Crucifixion. With that piece, I knew I had a chance and would continue to build my sculptures in my off time. In 1984 I felt it was time to be more committed. The ability, knowledge, skill, creativeness, and ingenuity were coming together, and I needed a place to make it happen. I purchased land and erected a studio in Gibsonburg, Ohio. Grinders, sanders, rollers, benders, saws, welders, plasma arcs, cutting torches, welding tables, anvils, vises, clamps, air compressors, overhead chain falls, and a multitude of hand tools were acquired and put in place, and the sculptures of welded stainless steel were then built.”

Havens's studio and the Rose Bronze Foundry he owns and operates are housed in a 3,300 square foot steel building that took eight years to build. The studio also contains an office, gallery, modeling room, and fabricating room. The one-acre site is serene and picturesque, and a number of sculptures are displayed around the property.

Explaining his interest in, and the challenges and pleasures of, sculpting in stainless steel, Havens said, “To work in stainless steel naturally draws comparisons to the work of the late David Smith. Do I mind? Of course not. He was there first, a trailblazer for some to follow if they could.



From Top:
THINKER, 5' x 4' x 3'6"

NATIVE SON
Stainless Steel and Found Objects

Right:
Artist in Studio

Below:
DANCER II in the Studio
79" x 40" x 24"



Stainless is a bear. I mean it is so tough at times, but the results are the whole thing. When you get done, you really have something. The interior structure of the Statue of Liberty, the whole new structure on the inside, has been replaced with stainless steel, and the engineers say that even in the salty atmosphere of New York

Harbor, it will last 1,000 years. Now that is part of the glory of stainless steel. It may be a tool breaker, and it may test every bit of knowledge and skill that you have to make it work. It is very difficult and if you put too much heat in it, it will distort in a second. It is darn hard to cut most of the time, and it is very difficult to do a decent weld on it and make it look the way you want but, again, the results are everything. It is such a wonderful, wonderful medium in which to work. It reflects the light beautifully. On a nice blue day, the reflection of the sky bounces off of it. You get the reflection of the green grass, the clouds. If it is nighttime, lights reflect and it looks like the facets of a diamond.”

Choosing to use stainless steel for sculpture is an expensive proposition. Havens usually draws his ideas out on the floor of his studio with soapstone and produces a maquette before he cuts out the pieces for a larger sculpture. The sculptor has developed a fluid style in his stainless steel body of work that seems to push the limits

of the flat plate material. The texture with which Havens completes his stainless sculptures is stunning. Some observers

mistake the highly reflective texturing, created by using body sanding disks applied with a right-angle grinder, as the strokes of a paint brush.

Although Havens is most recognized for his work in stainless steel, his abilities go beyond the abstract style of many of his monumental works. He has built a foundry and produced several lifelike bronzes. He is currently completing a bronze bust of Gandhi, an impressive realistic depiction of the holy man. He is preparing to seek commissions for both the bust and full body sculptures. Viewing photographs of the sculptures that Havens has completed over the years, it is easy to appreciate the success he has had in finding permanent public and private collections across the country for his work.

SEMPITERNUM, a six foot tall expression of birth, rejuvenation, and life, found its home with the Danbury Company in Ohio and was purchased through one of many exhibitions that Havens has been juried into at the prestigious Toledo Museum of Art.

Havens’s beautiful *DANCER* series is a study of the human form, modeled after gymnasts and ballet dancers. His goal was to create the symmetry of an hourglass in his figures. *NATIVE SON* is a six foot tall abstract sculpture that Havens created to depict the typical Midwestern industrial worker. The stainless steel and bronze sculpture contains gears within the center of the piece, which were acquired from a printing press that was once used by the *Toledo Blade*, a local newspaper printed not far from where Havens lives today. “It’s an abstract of a man, and it is based upon someone working with his hands. Toledo’s industrial roots are reflected in the work. The pyramid shows the foundation of the city and its growth.”

Right:
SEMPITERNUM
72" x 63" x 30"

Below:
FRENCH CURVE

One sculpture that Havens created carries with it a story of which the artist is very proud. "On March 16, 1988, Sadaam Hussein bombed Halabjah's 85,000 Kurds with chemical weapons. Halabjah is a small community between Iran and Iraq on the Iranian border. Hussein's armies gassed 5,000 men, women and children. Iran, shortly after that, advertised in all of the international art magazines for the creation of a holocaust memorial; the prize was \$50,000 dollars."

Havens entered the competition with an idea in mind for the entry that involved the first written word in world history for "peace." His investigation determined that the first written language was Sumerian cuneiform, a language created out of necessity for the grain trade circa 2500 B.C. His proposal to Iran for the creation of a ten-meter peace sculpture in cuneiform was so well received that Havens received phone calls and faxes regularly from the Iranian architect who was responsible for the project. Unfortunately, the entire project came to a halt with the start of the Persian Gulf War, and Havens never heard from the architect again.

Havens began exhibiting a seven foot stainless steel version of the *PEACE* sculpture, the maquette for the competition he had entered in Iran. While well received in a number of venues, the sculpture generated positive reviews as a geometric shape rather than for the significance of the cuneiform symbol. Havens's classmates, from the Woodstock School in Mussoorie, India, came up with the idea that it would be wonderful if a sculpture of his could be installed at their Alma Mater. The school promotes peace and diversity, and includes students from Asia, the Middle East, and Australia who use the school to learn English in preparation for Western educations. Havens discussed the significance of the *PEACE* sculpture with some of his former classmates who became enthusiastic about it. In June 2004, in celebration of the Woodstock School's sesquicentennial, the class of 1957 gifted the school with Haven's sculpture. The sculpture now resides at the school on a terrace that has been formally renamed the Peace Terrace.

Havens understands the power of the *PEACE* sculpture for himself and others. "You know, when you've got something like the Peace sculpture over in the Himalayan mountains and, perhaps, it is easily something that could be there three hundred plus years, and it is going to affect school youngsters, kindergarten through twelfth grade, that is powerful, very powerful. If that is not enough to get you out of bed in the morning and get you charging, I don't know what could be."

James Havens is a member and past president of the Toledo Area Sculptors Guild, and an exhibiting member of the International Sculpture Center, a member of the National Sculpture Society, and of the Cleveland Sculpture Center. For more information about his sculptures, please contact him at: 521 West Main, Woodville, Ohio, 43469. ✕

