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# DESIGN

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# Collaboration With Stone

Exploring the artistry of New Hampshire sculptor Gary Haven Smith

WRITTEN BY LORI FERGUSON • PHOTOGRAPHED BY JARED CHARNEY

**T**he well-known paradoxical question asks what happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object. In the case of Gary Haven Smith, the answer is simple: art. Employing everything from diamond-embedded saws and carbide-tipped tools to a computer mouse, this Northwood, New Hampshire, artist adroitly manipulates seemingly unyielding materials into graceful works of art. Massive slabs of granite are transformed into sinuous forms that bring into question previous assumptions about the malleability of stone, while lead, slate, copper, and gold leaf become willing palettes for organically inspired lines and silhouettes.

“There’s always been this philosophical thread that runs through my life,” says the Boston-born Smith, “a desire to tap into natural phenomena, and making art lends itself to such exploration.” Although his creative impetus has remained consistent, he acknowledges his process has evolved. “As a young artist, I worked more from my mind,” says the 66-year-old Smith. “I would come up with a sketch and then find a stone that would accommodate the shape I envisioned. I was

**IN HIS STUDIO** in Northwood, New Hampshire, sculptor Gary Haven Smith uses straps and pulleys to move and manipulate huge slabs of quarried stone or boulders he finds on his property into position. He then uses a variety of tools to shape the rock into sinuous sculptural forms.

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## ART

**CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT:** Smith uses materials such as lead, wood, and slate to create a tactile surface in his paintings. Scraps of discarded rock pile up in the rear of his studio. A boulder sits on the diamond wire saw, which cuts through stone much like a band saw and is the main tool for cutting and shaping quarried stone and glacial boulders. *Over and Under* is one of Smith's finished sculptures.



essentially projecting my ego onto the materials and trying to control the whole process." As he matured, however, his interactions with granite became more intuitive, Smith says. Today, he approaches each stone as a partner. "I've learned to strike a balance between my will and that of the stone," he says. "Each rock comes with its own criteria, and to reach the final expression, we work together."

This collaboration can take many forms, Smith notes, and it is this flexibility and fluidity that sustain his interest. When painting, Smith embeds slate, copper, lead, and gold leaf on board, thereby creating images with both tactile and visual appeal. When

sculpting, he leaves the "skin" on the boulders he shapes, both as a nod to the granite's past and as a provocative counterpoint to his smooth interior incisions. Oftentimes, Smith forces holes through obstinate matter, enabling light to pierce a once-impenetrable surface. "The stone is like the human spirit; it has a hardness that implies confidence, yet if manipulated, it can become fragile, just like life, which can change in an instant. It's these dichotomies that I love," Smith says. "Rough versus smooth, tough versus fragile, that's the edge I'm looking for — that's what gets my blood pumping!"

When he's engaged in creating, the pro-

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### ART



**“I’VE LEARNED TO strike a balance between my will and that of the stone,” says Smith, shown here with a sculptural work in progress. “Each rock comes with its own criteria, and to reach the final expression, we work together.”**

cess often dictates the path he will take. “I’m facing a big hunk of rock and things don’t always turn out the way I plan,” says Smith. “There’s a give-and-take with the stone, a struggle that adds spontaneity, even though I’m working with a material that’s somewhat intractable. Yet, if I remain open to the possibilities, I find that remarkable things can happen.” By way of illustration, Smith explains how he inadvertently began creating the delicate, fluid forms that constitute works such as *Strata*, an exquisite sculpture composed of thin slices of granite nestled one atop another and balanced precariously at the tip of two slender 5-foot-tall rods of steel. “As a sculptor,” he says, “you typically approach a block of stone thinking, ‘OK, I’ll remove what I must to create a sculpture.’ But one day as I was cutting a boulder, I realized that these stone peelings, a byproduct of my efforts, were really lovely, and suddenly the scraps became the sculpture. I just needed to be open to the stone’s potential to see it.”

Art consultant June LaCombe of June LaCombe SCULPTURE in Pownal, Maine, curates and sites sculpture exhibitions across Maine and has represented Smith for more than 25 years. “Gary has an extraordinary sensibility,” she says. “He juxtaposes rustic materials with rich, sensual materials like gold leaf and moss to create sculpture that

is both beautiful and powerful. I believe in his work, I live with his work, and I know how powerful it is in the landscape. I think Gary is one of the greatest artists living today.”

Sarah Chaffee, who represents Smith at McGowan Fine Art, a gallery in Concord, New Hampshire, is equally enamored. “Gary’s paintings embody such elegance and refinement,” she says. “His newest incorporate beautiful organic forms inspired by his gardens, and they’re absolutely exquisite — soothing and so quiet — while others contain gold leaf, which adds a dynamic element to the composition.”

“Every day is a new beginning,” says Smith. “Yes, I’ve been an artist for many years now, so I have experience and confidence in my skills, but with each new day, I’m in the moment. I don’t think about the past; instead, I ask myself, ‘What am I going to do in the next five minutes?’ I know that if I stay present and committed to a piece, my energy will transfer to the work and someone else will feel it, too.” 🏠

📍 More of Gary Haven Smith’s work can be viewed on his website, [garyhavensmith.com](http://garyhavensmith.com). He is represented by June LaCombe SCULPTURE, Hawk Ridge Farm, 90 Minot Road, Pownal, ME, 207-688-4468; [junelacombesculpture.com](http://junelacombesculpture.com) and by McGowan Fine Art, 10 Hills Avenue, Concord, NH, 603-225-2515; [mcgowanfineart.com](http://mcgowanfineart.com).