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ARTIST GEORGE SHERWOOD'S capacious Ipswich, Massachusetts, studio is flooded with natural light, a constant source of inspiration. The gentle curve of the interior rooflines is reminiscent of the keel of an overturned boat, a subtle nod to Sherwood's lifelong love of the water.

Dancing With Nature

Movement and light drive George Sherwood's compelling kinetic sculptures

WRITTEN BY LORI FERGUSON • PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERIN LITTLE

ART



Growing up on the Connecticut shores of Long Island Sound, artist George Sherwood spent countless hours on a sailboat with his father, plying the waters and learning the interplay of natural elements. “My dad was a keen observer,” Sherwood says. “He was always pointing out little things that indicated an impending change in the wind or the weather, and I found it fascinating. He used the wind and water to sail, and today I use these same elements to create sailboats on land with my sculpture. I use the wind to make waves, the waves to move the light, and the light to move the viewer.”

A kinetic sculptor, Sherwood crafts his mesmerizing pieces from stainless steel, employing equipment standard to metal machining and fabrication — lathes, milling machines, benders, saws, shears, and spot welders — as well as a wide assortment of hand tools. “There’s no standard process,” Sherwood says. “Each sculpture starts from scratch, with lots of crude sketching, small aluminum flashing, and hot-melt glue models, and is gradually refined.” The results of his labors are stunning assemblages of highly reflective rods, spheres, panels, and disks that exploit the vagaries of wind and light to amplify the dynamic relationships of objects in motion. The sculptures represent a dazzling pas de deux of engineering and art that engages the viewer from every angle. “The quality of movement is very important,” says Sherwood. “Is it slow and flowing or fast and erratic? And does it move you?”

PUNCTUATING THE LANDSCAPE of his Ipswich property is Sherwood’s elegant *Wind Sphere*. The natural world acts as both lens and conduit for the artist. “It is quite enjoyable to learn about the world through sculpture, setting it free and letting it breathe,” he says.

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TWO OF SHERWOOD'S smaller sculptures (ABOVE LEFT) dance in the light streaming through his studio window. "Where does the light go?" Sherwood asks. "How does it navigate the space? How does it rise and fall, appear and disappear? How can it be captured and released?" The artist (ABOVE RIGHT) stands with a partially assembled sculpture: "I'm usually asking a question about the form of the object and the form of the motion," Sherwood says.

Sherwood's interest in motion is longstanding. Throughout his formative years, he was constantly in the fourth dimension, exploring the bounds of movement — sailing, swimming, tennis, squash, and later, during college, juggling, mime, and physical theater. "The activities of my youth contributed greatly to my development of spatial awareness and appreciation of the laws of physics," Sherwood says. "Juggling, in particular, taught me how interesting it can be to consider the many possibilities of animating objects in space, from the minimal simplicity of one or two elements to the orchestration of large, soaring arrays."

Sherwood's interest in the art of movement blossomed during his time at Hartford Art School at the University of Hartford in Connecticut. Inspired by the elements of physical theater, especially the Swiss troupe Mummenschanz and the American dance company Pilobolus, Sherwood choreographed his own theatrical performances, incorporating animated props, sculpture, and



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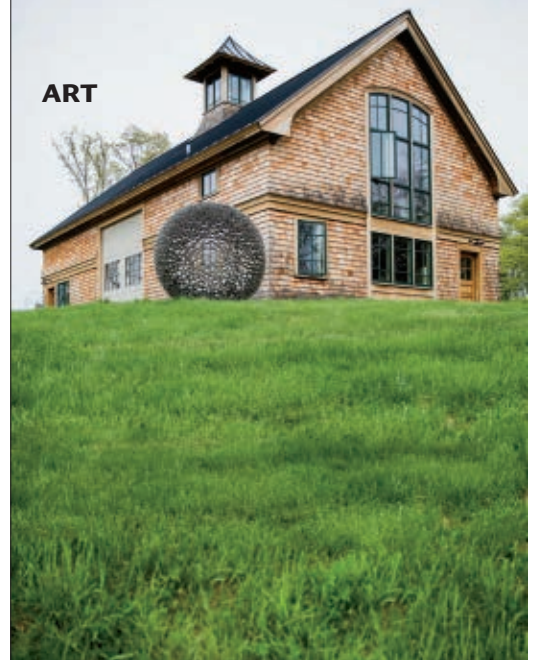
masks. Next up was a bachelor's degree in engineering at the University of Vermont, then a position with LEGO Futura, the research and development arm of LEGO. During that period, he discovered the wind-powered sculpture of the pioneering kinetic artist George Rickey, and the hook was set. Sherwood realized that he, too, wanted to devote his time to sculpture.

Today, the Ipswich, Massachusetts, artist spends his days in pursuit of light, its ephemeral, mercurial quality a constant goad to looking more closely at the world around him. "The natural world is so engaging — the shapes, the forms, the movement, the light,"

A LARGE SCULPTURE of a human head is part of a duo of pieces entitled *Steel Life*, shown several years ago in a Boston Sculptors Gallery exhibition. Both pieces were subsequently purchased by a private collector.

says Sherwood. "It's a cliché, I realize, but nature is a constant source of inspiration. We all have a basic intuition for light," he continues. "Think of our attraction and emotional response to the reflection of light coming off the water at sunset. My aim is to create three-dimensional paintings of light that pull down the sky, lift up the earth, and gather everything in between."

ART



SHERWOOD'S STUDIO BARN, designed and built by Robert Weatherall of Weatherall Design in Ipswich, Massachusetts, offers soaring spaces and generous views of the natural world just beyond its walls (ABOVE). Inside Sherwood's two-story studio (FACING PAGE) there is plenty of space for the artist to experiment with his materials and compositions.

Sherwood's 2014 sculpture *Memory of Water* offers a case in point. A stainless steel sphere 7 feet in diameter, it is composed of short, open, highly polished tubes that reflect the light and encircle internal, mirror-finished elements that rotate. The piece is simultaneously reflecting light and bathed in its own image, Sherwood observes, and represents an exquisite union of object and movement. "I'm not interested in the mechanics of the work per se," he says. "I'm not making a wind turbine. I'm trying to marry the form of the object and the form of the movement. One suggests the other, and when I achieve equilibrium between the two, it creates truth, magic, and a sense of place."

"George's work as a kinetic sculptor puts him in a unique niche," says Cynthia Reeves, who has galleries in Walpole, New Hampshire, and at Mass MoCA's Campus in North Adams, Massachusetts. She has orchestrated exhibitions of the artist's works here and abroad. "He comes to his art from a distinct engineering standpoint as well as from his strong kinship with the elements: a marvelous sensitivity to light, water, and the movement of air. His sculptures combine these elements to create a physical manifestation of his interaction with the natural world. He's also meticu-



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lous in his use of materials. Each element of his sculpture is finely attached and pitched to achieve the movement and interplay of light that make his works so compelling.”

“George is a brilliant artist,” agrees June LaCombe, whose gallery, June LaCombe SCULPTURE, in Pownal, Maine, has represented Sherwood since 2005. “His sculptures are both highly refined and elegantly simple, and they move with each breath of wind.” The pieces evoke flocks

of birds and schools of fish, LaCombe says. “Looking at one of George’s sculptures is like watching a dance or theater performance — you’re completely drawn in. Each piece is an exquisitely beautiful reminder that all is fleeting.”

“There’s something about natural light and the collaboration with weather that I love,” Sherwood says. “I have the ability to use my mind and my hands to create something and make it come alive, and that’s incredibly rewarding.”

i George Sherwood Sculpture, Ipswich, MA, georgesherwood.com, is represented by Cynthia Reeves, cynthia-reeves.com, and June LaCombe SCULPTURE, junelacombesculpture.com. Sherwood’s *Wind, Waves & Light* exhibit is at Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens through October 12. Details on Page 153.

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