

Art The Initiators

THE HAMPTONS HAVE A long and prominent history of famous artists and their abstract art that influenced generations to come, like Jackson Pollack and Willem De Kooning. Today, many artists come to the Hamptons solely to pursue that medium of painting. There is, however, a great deal of history regarding influential sculpting out here as well, and good sculpting has a great deal of impact on successful abstract painting. The similarities between the two forms of art are undeniable, even if they often go unnoticed.

Steve Loschen is a sculptor. His work, immense and sometimes overwhelming, is often something one might want to display in a living room, if it came in a smaller size. Loschen actually started in on art as a painter, and recently he has begun to slowly move back in that direction. For the past few years he focused more on sculpting than painting, popping out piece after piece whenever he

has had the time. Most of it is very abstract, taking different shapes and forms. This, however, has clearly helped his painting evolve to where it is now: a wholly abstract form of art with a strong kick of modern pop. Loschen is one of the few people who understand the connection between abstract painting and sculpting.

That is not to say he has given up sculpting by any means. In fact, the truth is precisely the opposite. Loschen only very recently finished installing a large sculpture conglomerate in front of the Clam Bar in Amagansett called the Metallic Herb Garden. It is something he has worked on for about two years now, though it was in his head for years before that. There are six pieces to it, all painted blue (despite the fact that everyone told him to paint them different colors), which are lit up under bright lighting at night. It was done with the help of Loschen's longtime friend and owner of the Clam Bar, Dick Erling.

I sat down with Steve Loschen at his

studio for an hour, where we talked about his work, the Metallic Herb Garden, the difference between painting and sculpting and how one affects the other.

Improper Hamptonian: How did you start in on sculpting?

Steve Loschen: I was an art major in high school. That's my art education. After graduating, for ten years I did some art, but not a lot of it. In 1980, I met sculptor Bill Tar. I started to be his assistant. From there I learned a lot. He was not a painter. But he had done paintings early. He taught me welding, molding, bronze chasing, and wood carving. I did just about everything for him and that's really my education as far as my sculpting goes. He just enlightened me totally.

IH: Do you see yourself as more of a painter or sculptor?

SL: I find it harder to paint. But I am definitely considered more of a sculptor. This year I went back to painting though. I did a show at Ashwouge Hall

in The Springs with paintings only. A lot of people came back and said "I didn't even know you painted." I would really like to say I like them both equally, but painting is just two-dimensional. I work in three dimensions so much easier. That's how I work. It's like the carpentry. I do some welding too. So I work in three dimensions all the time, that's very easy for me, but I'm going back to painting. I stopped painting and just did sculptor for about four or five years.

IH: What made you want to get back into painting?

SL: It's more of a challenge in two dimensions. I want to get dimensions back and forth and it's very hard in paintings, so it's a challenge. In the beginning it wasn't really a challenge. It was just hard for me to deal with it. As time went on, when I guess I did the sculpture, I realized what my paintings were. What was in my paintings, I was seeing in the sculpture then. I don't think people really understood my paintings



The Balance of Dimensions

Steven Loschen's paintings feed his sculptures and visa versa

Interview by Palmer Mitchell

until after they saw my sculptures.

IH: You can definitely see multiple dimensions in your paintings.

SL: If you look at [the one behind you], which is a black and white painting, a recent one, it is very much like my sculptures. It shows it much easier in black and white.

IH: Bill Tar was a major influence for you with regards to your sculpting. Who are your influences as far as your paintings go?

SL: These paintings are very poppy. Like [Alexander] Calder, he's a sculpture influence. A lot of people would say [Fernand] Lèger, um, some people say [Joan] Miró, but I wouldn't really say that. Roy Liechtenstein is definitely somebody whose work I like. It's not that I was really influenced by him, but when I'd look through art books I would pick it out. Believe it or not, a lot of information on visual art I picked up by just looking through art magazines, just skimming through them. National Geographic is one of the best for that.

IH: You're not from the Hamptons originally?

SL: No. I'm from Bellmore, Long Island. I left there in 1977, went out to visit a friend in Montauk and never went back. I just loved it. That's when it was just a small town.

IH: How has the growth of the Hamptons affected your artwork, if at all?

SL: It hasn't. I met the artists [when I first moved here]. They were here. I met [Willem] De Kooning. He definitely brought me back into the art, because when I saw his studio I was just totally influenced by it. I was always an abstract painter, and I didn't know who De Kooning was, but he was definitely a breakthrough [for me]. Going back to it in 1984, I was absolutely broke and I just painted like mad, so I was definitely influenced by seeing his work. But I knew Bill Tar, Peter Boozer. I met a lot of other artists out here just by doing handyman type work.

IH: How old were you when you sold your first piece?

SL: Actually, Lisa De Kooning bought my first piece in 1984, at the first show I did at Ashwouge Hall. Since then I pretty much show them every year there. There are some local restaurants that display my art too.

IH: You just did a big installation piece outside the Clam Bar in Amagansett.

SL: When I first started doing my sculpture I started monumentally. My first one was 11 feet tall solid steel. That was the first sculpture I ever built, but what I was doing was sketching my ideas for sculptures. One day I said, "Wow, it would be nice to do some kind of a garden." So I came up with an idea, about 12 years ago, of a piece called the Metallic Herb Garden, which would be a fenced-in piece. In that piece would be the actual abstract plant that I make. I would say it's about 50% found objects. The piece has boat propellers, skin diving tanks, bowling balls, cannon balls, hay racks and all kinds of stuff. There's actually four plants, but it consists of six different pieces. The fence is 15x14 feet and the pieces of sculpture are 15 feet also, so it's a major installation. Each one is sitting in about 400 pounds of concrete because of the weight of the solid steel, you don't want that tumbling over. And it's really well lit.

IH: How did you hook up with the Clam Bar then?

SL: Dick Erling, the owner of the Clam Bar, is a friend of mine forever. I used to be a bartender and he was a restaurant owner and that's how we met. I actually helped him open his restaurant on the North Shore. For years I photographed that place and I said, "I'd love to put a piece here." One day we're talking and he told me, "Hey, you want to do it, then do it!" Sight unseen. It's a big piece too. I asked him about lights and electric and he put the lights up and he paid for everything.

IH: How long will it stay there?



Steven in front of "Metallic Herb Garden," an installation next to the Clam Bar in Napeague

Pete Donahue photo

SL: It's definitely for sale. I sure would like about forty thousand dollars for it. I couldn't take any less than that. But it's for sale. I don't think that Dick will take it. Dick's not a fine art collector. It's there until it sells. I might just keep it there forever unless it sells. I knew that you couldn't get a better spot than to be on Montauk Highway. How many people go by there? I used to have four pieces at Cyril's.

IH: How much did your work sell for in the beginning?

SL: I started at \$500 a piece. I said, "I'm not going to sell anything, I don't care how big it is, for less than a week's wage." I've stuck to that. To this day I still sell from \$500 to \$5,000 for a painting, but I started my big sculptures at \$3,500, for sixteen feet of steel. The sculptures sell. The people like them. I only hand paint them, so there easy to maintain, they hold up well. You get fine art sculptures, their stainless steel, you're talking a lot of money for maintenance. People can change the colors. There are four colors that I use and people can have them any color they want.

IH: What is your favorite material to use?

SL: I'm not sure if I've found it yet. My favorite materials to use would be something that dries fast, works fast. I've always loved plaster because you can put it together fast and it dries fast.

IH: How would you describe your work?

SL: Shapes. Lines. Organic lines. Abstract shapes, forms. Playing in and out. I think it's very, I have to say, humorous, musical, happy, which is something I'm very interested in., and very large. Also, it's very powerful.

IH: What inspires you?

SL: I'd have to say, as I'm an abstract, that I think it has to do with eyesight. When my sight was going, before I wore glasses, I was seeing this very abstract kind of stuff. My paintings are very heavily painted and then they come out with a lot of lines. I'm playing with a lot shapes and forms from what I see in my subconscious. It's not real abstract at all.

IH: Do you have a favorite piece that you've done?

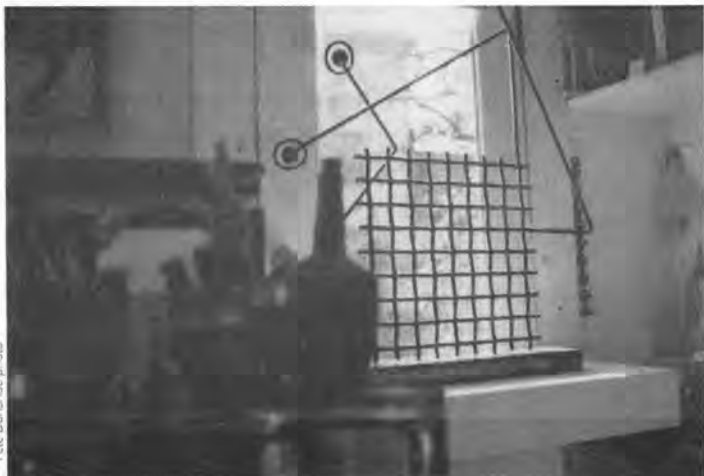
SL: I would have to say the Joker. I have a piece called the Joker and I would have to say that that's probably my favorite piece right now. Hopefully that will change though.

IH: What do you like about it?

SL: Just the shapes, the color, and the energy of it. Most of my paintings, if I don't like them, I don't keep them around too long. I just paint over them. A lot of these paintings are very over-painted. You don't see it because of the solid color. If you took them off the wall and the lights hit behind them, you wouldn't believe the shapes and forms that are in there.

IH: What made you want to become an artist?

SL: I have to say that I was into abstract art and art since day one. I can remember going back and forth doing stuff in kindergarten, and my teachers saying, "Oh, you want to be an artist." In High School I had some good art teachers and they influenced me. On the other side, the family side, my parents didn't understand art. They had no understanding of it. Luckily, I came out here and I came across De Kooning and it was a break out for me. I realised, "Hey, this guys making money out at art." Money isn't the only thing, but it sure would be nice. I'd love to just do my art [full-time].



Pete Donahue photo