

Rocky Forge News

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Meetings

By Ted Stout

It has been awhile since we have had a good meeting of the group. Hopefully, many of you can attend the October 13th meeting at Ted's shop. The time will be 9:00 A.M. There will be a short meeting, then if the weather permits this time we will have an open forge time with some instruction on techniques. I will also have the 100# power hammer ready to use so it might be a good idea to measure your hardy hole size in case we decide to make some anvil tools. I think if weather permits we can have a real good time.

Lunch will be bring your own and we can set around and socialize during lunch. I bought some real nice demo tapes as SOFA so if you want we can set those up for viewing.

See you on the 13th.

Ted

What Do You Want to Make?

By Dominick Andrisani (andrisan@purdue.edu)



So you are a blacksmith and can make things from metal. What do you want to make? This is perhaps the hardest question for many people, including myself.

Since blacksmithing is a traditional craft it is tempting to make only traditional items. This is OK, but I want to encourage each of you to try to come up with new creations in metal. This can be fun, frustrating, disastrous, yet rewarding.



Creativity in metal has two components: visualizing what you want to create and fabricating that vision

in metal. I want to encourage you to be bold in your visualization and be clever in your fabrication.

I would like you to think of metal as a medium for the creation of uniquely shaped artistic objects. I encourage you to visualize your metalwork without constraints, limits or bounds. Take risks in dreaming up new shapes to make. Visualize creations that you have no idea how to make. For people like me who have spent too many years in a profession dominated by strict procedures for doing everything, the visualization process is the hardest and scariest part of creative metalwork.

Visualization is hard because it uses the right side of our brain, a capability we, perhaps, have not often fully utilized or developed. Scientists say that the right side of our brain deals best with random thoughts, intuitive thinking, holistic ideas, synthesizing visions, subjective evaluation, and looking at the whole. The challenge for each of us is to develop and use the right side of our brains. Our metalwork is the ideal place to do this.



Visualization is scary because I might see nothing, or I might see only ugly things, or I might see things that I like but that no one else likes. My ego is often unhelpful in visualization because I do not enjoy failing or being laughed at, and both are possible.

When I am in the uncomfortable spot of seeing nothing, I try to relax and give the process some time. Anxiety or time pressure is not helpful in this delicate situation. Sketching on paper may be helpful. Remember, only you have to understand the sketch. Going around the shop and looking at raw metal may be helpful. I believe that raw metal

talks to me. So I only have to listen to the unconventional voice of metal. I don't know what will work for you as you try to visualize a creative piece, but I encourage you to give yourself a fair chance to come up with something new.



When you try to visualize your new piece you may only see ugly things. When this happens I encourage you to look around you. There is beauty everywhere. Read the newspapers and note the shapes that interest you. Catalogs are another marvelous place to see interesting shapes and objects. Books can be helpful. Keep a

notebook of interesting items you have cutout or collected from various sources. Nature is the ultimate source of beauty. For instance, look closely at an orchid. Use these as sources as inspiration. Something will come to you. Trust yourself.

My biggest fear is that the things that I visualize and create will be laughed at and be unanimously declared hideous and worthless. I try, without much success, to convince myself that I create in metal only for myself. Therefore, I don't care what other people think. If only this were more true. The fact of the matter is I do care what other people think. Frankly, for me this is the hardest part of the whole creative metalworking process. I am afraid of ridicule.

Who am I to think that I can do something creative or artistic or beautiful? Artistic? Who am I to claim that I am an artist?



When I ask these questions a type of paralysis of the spirit sets in, and I start thinking about making a few more S-hooks. Perhaps you have felt some of these same fears and the resulting paralysis regarding your own metalwork. I don't know what will help you in these matters, but I will tell you how I try to deal with those fears.

Firstly, I believe that there is a part of me from birth that is artistic and that remains under-developed. It is my goal to encourage that artistic side as I strive to reach my true potential in life. I recognize that I may have to use unfamiliar methods to accomplish this. Secondly, I recognize that artistic endeavors are not intrinsically easy. I may fail many times before I achieve some success. I am willing to fail many times. I draw strength and encouragement from the trials and tribulations of artists in all media and throughout history. Thirdly, I will be kind to myself in judging my own success. I will draw encouragement from small accomplishments. I view my success as a journey, not as a destination. Fourthly, I accept that my metalwork may not be attractive to anyone, and this is OK (sort of).



As I stated earlier, creativity in metal has two components: visualizing what I want to create and fabricating that vision in metal. My comments to this point have dealt with the visualization component. Regarding the latter, sometimes the fabrication techniques are straightforward and can be accomplished with available tooling. However, unique creations in metal may require unique fabrication processes and tools. Cleverness and creativity may be called for in the fabrication process as well as in the visualization process. When fabrication presents these challenges, consulting books and other printed literature can be helpful as well as consulting with blacksmithing colleagues. Groups like the Rocky Forge Blacksmithing Guild and the Indiana Blacksmithing Association can be valuable sources of information.

Once processes and tooling are available, fabrication is often logical and sequential. Scientists believe the left side of the brain is used for logical, sequential, rational, analytical, and objective thinking and focuses on smaller parts of the overall problem. Many people, such as me, have spent considerably more effort in their lifetimes developing the left side of their brain and feel more comfortable in these types of endeavors. Regrettably, schools often emphasize logical thinking at the expense of creative thinking. Thus, it is not surprising that many of us are more comfortable and competent as metal fabricators rather than as visualizers.



In summary, creative metalwork is the realization of a unique vision in shaped metal. We can all benefit as metalworkers by continuing to develop both visualization and fabrication skills.

Smoke and Noise

Articles from e-mail and the Internet

Compiled by David Childress

I ran across this and thought that it might be of interest to some of you. ESTY.com is an internet forum for selling handmade Arts & Crafts.

From: Kirsten Skiles (aka knitsteel in many online places)

Subject: [TheForge] Knitsteel / etsy.com & artist websites, sharing in the community

My take on Etsy- it can work, if you're willing to put work into it.

You really have to do your own promotion. It's very cheap to list, 20cents for a 4 month listing, and then they take a 3.5% fee from every sale made on Etsy. It's super easy to list and sell, as long as you can edit your own digital photos. Payment is handled through the seller. I accept only Paypal, but you can also choose to accept any other method of payment, like Google checkout, or whatever else is out there.

Go browse the site. Do different searches for blacksmith, steel, wrought iron, welded- terms that might apply to what you are doing. Then in the right hand sidebar of each shop, you can see how long the person has been on Etsy and the number of items they've sold. You can click on the items sold link and see which kind of items have sold for them. You can see prices, but you can make your guesses based on the prices of items currently for sale.

You can also look at a website called www.etsytools.com. It gives some data on top sellers, all sorts of stuff that I should study, but I don't.

So far, Etsy seems like the best online market for my needs. There are also sites like www.dawanda.com, www.homegrownmarket.com (USA artists only), www.rubylane.com, www.lov.li (not a clue), eBay (you all know). There are even more out there, but like I said, for my needs, Etsy works out best right now. You can certainly list and sell on more than one site.

The majority of my sales have been in the USA, but I have also sold to England, Canada, The

Netherlands and Germany. I like the idea that I'm reaching markets that I never would have reached on my own.

I promote myself through my business cards, my blog, my signature in emails and on discussion forums, and on flickr. I don't put myself into it fulltime, but I feel like I get out of it what I put into it.

If you do sign up on Etsy, choose your username carefully. You are stuck with it. I might not choose knitsteel if I were to start all over, but it's become an online identity, which I don't want to lose now that I'm selling consistently.

I have to put this in. You can't go into it with the grumpy attitude that "people just won't pay for traditional craftsmanship" or the thought that people ought to automatically recognize the quality of your work.

You have to go into it positive - genuinely excited about the opportunity to show your work and educate the online community. (I don't call myself a traditional smith, so I highlight my distinctive creative style for my Etsy work. I highlight my chasing and repousse skills for workshops and my high end work.) You need a unique product that shows your own distinct Brand of creativity. You have to have a beautiful product, a great attitude, and great customer service.

As far as workshops go- I think there is a need for both, the friendly hammer-ins that only cost as much as membership in a regional blacksmithing group and for the more detailed and pricey workshops. It's useful to both make your own tools and buy tools. Sharing information is one of the things that characterizes creative Americans. We are generous with our information and understand that it leads to greater prosperity all around.

-Kirsten Skiles (aka knitsteel in many online places)
<http://knitsteel.blogspot.com>
<http://knitsteel.etsy.com>

From: "Ben Barrett"
Subject: Re: [TheForge] Knitsteel /
etsy.com & artist websites, sharing in
the community

Agreed -- maybe you are talking about a different site, but I have been noticing etsy.com, especially since I have been trying to do a very similar thing (but on a smaller and more local scale). Sorry to talk tech here, but in support of artists making money, do many folks hear good things about etsy.com? Any other similar ventures I could look into? My idea is to allow artists who are not good businessfolk or marketers an easy outlet to sell their work, one where they (or their "agents", but not me or folks who run the website) do all of the active work once it is setup (receive payments, ship items, add new items, etc). Etsy seems to be working great and I've considered joining them instead... so I'm really curious on the subject. If it seems off-topic/OT, please just reply to me off-list.

ben

From what I have seen of this site there is fair traffic and a real chance to sell your handcrafted wares.. I do not know about everyone else but I do not have the room to keep all of the sample of things that I am learning to make to my satisfaction. Besides I can only afford a self supporting hobby and I would like to think what I make has a tangible value.-DEC

Announcements

The Rocky Forge News is available by E-mail and on our website (<http://www.rockyforge.org/>). If you wish to receive the newsletter via E-mail sent Dave Childress a note at trollkeep@gmail.com, or e-mail directly to rocky@rockyforge.org.