

THE IRON AND STEEL ARTISTRY OF JOE BURLEIGH



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FORGED IN FIRE

article Nicolette Toussaint photography provided



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If you have driven around Glenwood Springs or Carbondale, you've seen Joe Burleigh's work. His stringed and musical sculpture *Logarhythm* sits along Carbondale's Main Street and his *Iron Crystal Cubic*—a loose interpretation of the crystal matrix of iron atoms at room temperature—was installed in the summer 2014 in a roundabout in west Glenwood Springs.

Joe Burleigh's palette is steel and his paintbrush is a fiery gas forge. In addition to outdoor sculptures displayed in Grand Junction, Colorado; Sheridan, Wyoming; Chevy Chase Maryland; and Morristown, New Jersey, Burleigh creates handcrafted metal works that range from custom furniture to architectural elements. *Roaring Fork Lifestyle* recently encouraged Burleigh, who speaks softly but carries a big hammer, to talk about his work.

Where did you grow up and where did you get your artistic training?

I'm a Colorado native, raised in Grand Junction. I have a Bachelors of Arts in Environmental Design from the University of Colorado, Boulder. I have lived in the Roaring Fork Valley for the past 30 years. I have raised my two children here with my wife Debra.

Where do you do your work?

For the past 20 years, I have run my own business at the Roaring Forge L.L.C., a Blacksmiths Cooperative in Carbondale. I specialize in home furnishing, lighting, decorative and architectural metals for the construction and design trades. I also create public sculpture.

How would you characterize your sculpture?

Most of it is kinetic or interactive in some way. My ambition is to be as proficient a craftsman as I can, with my favorite material being steel. I want to make durable, unique and attractive objects that appeal to people of all ages, and then monetize them.

Logarithm invites musical play. You installed a towering metal cello in Broomfield, and you have sculpted metal violins. Do you have musical background?

My mother made me take piano in first grade; in second grade I switched to clarinet. Finally, in third grade, I tried the drums. That was the end of my musical training. But I love music and you can frequently find me at Steve's Guitars in Carbondale.

I thought it would be fun to make a stand-up bass out of metal, more as sculpture than as an actual musical instrument. That turned out pretty well so I made another. Then I decided to copy an old violin of my sister's. After that, my niece thought it would be a good idea to make a miniature violin. With *Logarithm*, I wanted to go big and get as low a tone as I could. Some day, we should put some strings on *When the Levy Breaks*, the big wave sculpture in downtown Carbondale. That would sound fantastic.

You have forged faux sword blades. What were those for?

The faux swords are for kids. I haven't met a kid yet who doesn't want a sword, and those I make are ceremonial and pretty harmless! They are made of light-gauge square tubing and you can't really put a sharp edge on them.

What inspires you?

I get a lot of my inspiration from nature and I love working with simple geometry like the platonic shapes. But probably my biggest inspiration is humanity. There is so much wonderful art in the world! Art being made now and art from thousands of years past. In my opinion, craft is art too. Everything is art, and then you die.

Where can people see your art?

I'm entering a piece in this year's Carbondale Art aRound Town show and possibly Grand Junction's Art on the Corner show.

*Burleigh's work can also be seen on his website: **JoeBurleigh.com**.
(<http://joeburleigh.com>)*

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