

# 'Carving into a beam of light' at Vero Beach Museum of Art

Siobhan Fitzpatrick Austin, The Newsweekly Published 1:02 a.m. ET Feb. 1, 2017



(Photo: Siobhan Fitzpatrick Austin)

Sculptor Larry Kagan has a twinkle in his hazel eyes, hinting at a keen, if subtle, sense of humor.

His remarkable steel sculptures now on display at Vero Beach Museum of Art's "Larry Kagan Object/Shadow" exhibition, reflect that that same sly whimsy.

There is his mischievous hand sculpture called "Shadow Puppet," his shoe sculpture "Oxford," and his poodle sculpture, appropriately called "Poodle," to name a few.

And then there are more serious works, such as "Faber Got His Gun." It was inspired by a photo in The New York Times of a Jewish French resistance fighter who posed with his gun as he described his wartime experience. This picture resonates with Kagan, as most of his extended family was wiped out by the Nazis in his native Belarus. Only Kagan, his parents and one uncle survived.

Kagan spent the first five years of his life with his parents in a U.S. occupation zone in Germany. Then they moved to Israel. When Kagan was 7, his father died. When his mother remarried an American six years later, they immigrated to the U.S., setting in the Bronx, New York. Currently, Kagan splits his time between Manhattan, upstate New York and Los Angeles.

## 'Scars of history'

Kagan did not start out working in steel. He first began thinking of its potential almost by chance in 1980, when he was on sabbatical from his job teaching sculpture and drawing at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. Kagan was living with his wife and first-born son in Tribeca, a neighborhood in Manhattan, when something serendipitous happened.

At that time in Tribeca, there was a lot of rebuilding going on and steel debris was everywhere. When Kagan would take his dog for a walk, he took not

or Kagan they were his "aha" moment.

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“What drew me to the steel was the range of lines and textures that steel fragments acquired over the span of their life, as they broke, bent, rusted, and otherwise carried the scars of their history. I suppose in that sense, my own history is somewhat reflected in that attraction,” says Kagan.

Up to that point, in addition to teaching, Kagan had studied printmaking, etching, lithography and acrylic sculpture. But when he started picking up the discarded steel pieces, he saw raw creative potential.

“I decided that I loved drawing the best and wanted to combine drawing ideas with my newly discovered love for mangled steel shapes,” he said.

## Inseparable

At first, he encountered what he perceived as a drawback to his new medium: shadows cast by the sculptures. He tried to avoid creating these shadows, until he realized that they were what made his steel sculptures so special. They had the power to draw viewers into the sculptures.

For example, a viewer might look at “Poodle” and not immediately recognize that it is a dog. But as soon as the viewer looks at the shadow that the sculpture casts on the wall behind it, there is no doubt.

Shadows became just as integral to Kagan’s work as the steel itself.

“My view of shadows is that they are inseparable from the objects that cast them. Although we rarely pay attention to them, we have to consider object and shadow as one entity,” he said. “For my work, I begin with the desired shadow image and then proceed to build a structure that will create it by carving into a beam of light with a steel construction one piece at a time.”

To date, there are not a lot of people in this unique field because as Kagan says, casting shadows is not a very efficient way to create images.

“So there aren’t that many of us,” says the artist.

Having such a niche in the art market has been good for Kagan, who has had exhibitions all over the world, from Milan to Los Angeles. His commissioned pieces command prices in the five-figure range. This is his first time showing in Vero and he is thrilled.

“I think the museum is delightful and I appreciated the opportunity to show a broader range of my work to a new audience,” he says.

Larry Kagan Object/Shadow will be on display at the Vero Beach Museum of Art through May 21, 2017. For more information, visit [VeroBeachMuseum.org](http://VeroBeachMuseum.org) (<http://VeroBeachMuseum.org>).

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