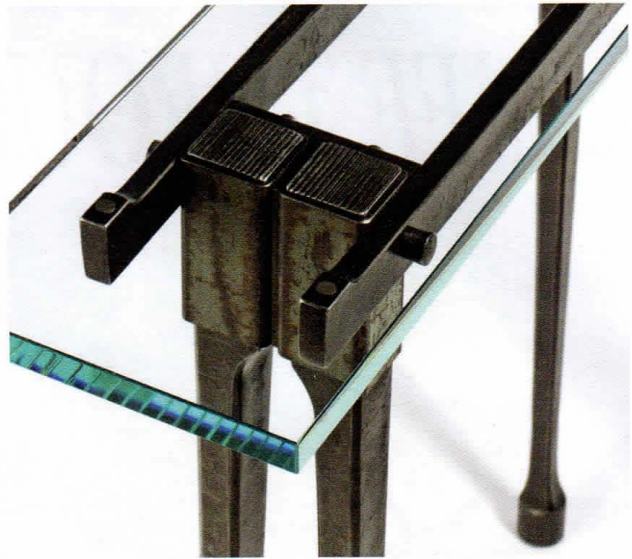


MADE OF CLEVELAND

When the city's influence goes deep beneath the surface

by Erin O'Brien

For some artists, simply depicting Cleveland in their work isn't enough. From a metal sculptor who hand forges steel in order to evoke the Cuyahoga's iconic bridges, to a pop artist who uncovers secret messages within our retail cast-offs, *CAN Journal* showcases three who literally imbue their work with essence of the city.



Stephen Yusko

At first blush, Stephen Yusko's Cuyahoga Bridge series tables reflect a gossamer delicacy, with long thin legs supporting narrow tops fashioned from glass or distressed steel. Deconstruct the work, however, and the tables reveal themselves to be longshoreman-tough and then some.

Every aspect of Yusko's work reflects an old-school Cleveland mentality, from design to technique. He starts with 1 3/4-inch thick steel rods that he fires to yellow-hot and shapes with a power hammer. He masters the finer details the old fashion way: with a hammer and anvil. Yusko uses a hulking lathe and milling machine to finish the elements with features that would make any seasoned tool and die man sigh: threaded self-leveling legs.

"I'm using this industrial material that's all about building and structures," says Yusko, "but I'm forging it as well and hopefully making these beautiful, light forms."

The tables are tranquil and cool, improbably far from the searing fire of his forge, the drone of Yusko's machines and curling piles of swarf—the shavings removed as he urges the pieces into his lofty designs. They reference the graceful arches of the Superior Viaduct and Veterans Memorial Bridge. Pilings and truss systems inspire Yusko's lines, while tabletops echo the bridge decks upon which we all travel. Yusko also directly incorporates industrial elements: a pallet jack fork becomes a tabletop; wooden cradles that formerly supported massive coils of steel provide an unexpected curve.

"There is such beauty in these forms," says Yusko of the industrial elements that inspire him. "I look at an old rusty piece of equipment, and I just think it's gorgeous, with its texture and finish. I'm drawn to the beauty in that."