

JOSH GARBER

DUALITY & COMPLETION

by Jill McLean



Josh Garber in his Cornelia Arts
Building studio, Chicago, 2016

JOSH GARBER'S studio at the Cornelia Arts Building, just off the Chicago brown line, was awash in the early evening sun. It was a hot day and two huge fans were going full blast to move the air around the studio, heightening the smell of steel bar, brass, organic materials and brick walls.

I'd been to his studio before, but four years had passed already. In a rare, two-hour discussion, he brought me into his world and we traversed through his first creative formations to the present. As we voiced energetic and artistic ideas, I couldn't help but see repeating patterns and driving forces in each phase of his work.

Josh's early years were spent between Canada (his birthplace) and the U.S. In high school, he found the rigors of sports as a way to apply his teenage angst and football was his weapon of choice. It aligned something greater in him: the idea of manipulation and touch. A whole world of art opened up before him, where he found that he could direct, touch and manipulate the medium of clay, pursuing coil pottery.

"Clay takes an imprint. It receives touch and has an immediate response. There's a direct correlation between my sports and how it developed my brain and body together, which I then put into the tactility of clay."

While attending Alfred University, his first tipping point was making steel yield like fabric, bringing a rigid material into something warm and sensual. Lattice style structures emerged without the binding nature of the coil pottery, instead breaking apart the mark-making. Transmuting the physical qualities through energy, never-ending, continually regenerating, always providing, removing density, making it pliable. In other words, transforming steel into fabric.

Josh's fascination of mitochondria, biology and cell structures pushed him into the next endeavor: his use of aluminum bar and the philosophy of dual dimensions. Bringing the idea of permanence and the ephemeral together, the metal is stationary but the surface is animated because the ends of the bars reflect and refract light at different angles. It even changes based on the weather, where you stand as you view it, and as you move around it (many are outdoor installations). The eye moves continually around the surface. You are at once immersed into a world of something solid but moving and full of energy, always changing. Two seeming opposites, but working together to form an experience of completion.

Then there is the beautiful use of industrial components that Josh has captured in his current work using hex nuts, screws and patina. The use of systems is elicited and it's no longer about the materials, but the

The thought of seeing, stainless steel screws and hex nuts, 14 x 36 x 28 inches, 2013



Bloom, aluminum bars and pipe, 8 x 10 x 10.5 inches, 2010



collaboration of components.

"I call these pieces "Eroticized Industry" because it's more charged, using industrial components that make a system (male / female), but also systems on a larger scale, one that connects all of us. It's "eroticized" because it's the experience of connecting people. This happens in larger ways like bridges, but also in the sexual and psychological aspects of connecting human beings. "Industry" is cold, inert, functional.

From left to right: *Beholden*, welded steel over brass, 110 x 1.5 x 4 inches, 2005; *After, we talked*, welded bronze bar, 20 x 26 x 16 inches, 2012; *Untitled*, 3-D printed branches, 7 x 8 x 6 inches, 2015; *In their clothes*, tree branches, tape and shrink wrap (plus snow), 12 x 18 x 14 feet, 2015



“Eroticized” makes it connected to us, makes it human, brings in the emotional and organic aspects.”

During his time of employing systems, he works in branches and shrink wrap. Wintertime installations purposely catch the snowfall, offering up the duality of temporal (branches) against ephemeral (changing environments like snow, footprints of viewers in the snow, outdoor weather and lighting). In the studio, he experiments with white on white as he creates 3-D printed branches and twisty-ties to hold them together (a system of sorts, and the duality of man-made against the concept of nature).

One of Josh's most spectacular pieces is a new sculpture exhibiting in EXPO CHICAGO 2016 with Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, titled *Beholden*.

The duality is supercharged in this one, as the heavier steel encases and caresses the softer, luminescent brass. Just as soulmates complement one another, they are also most complete together — one protecting, the other beatifying. The steel on the outside encases the gentle preciousness of the brass. Like a beautiful gem in a setting. And its height illuminates the very nature of this divine interaction, reflecting our hope for connection in perpetuity.

Josh Garber is a fascination to witness. Every phase connects to the next, and each time the level of depth increases, but is always added to what emerged previously. A perfect equation for the sculptor ... carving deeper, wider, higher in telling the world about his internal and public relationships with his process, materials and identity.

