

the Art of Involutes

The Forest City Gear booth at Gear Expo featured a wide variety of gears utilized in medical equipment, Indy cars, fishing reels, even the recently launched Mars Rover. Scattered among Forest City's products in Cincinnati were some unique gear sculptures created by an artist that finds more inspiration from the pages of industrial magazines than art galleries. Salem Barker incorporates gears and machinery into his art simply because industry has always been a part of who he is and where he came from.

"I've always had a boyish fascination with heavy industry, and being mechanically inclined I took immediate aptitude to machining and machine tool building. These trades eventually led me around the world as an onsite machinist. After years of projects on nuclear submarines, steel mills, mining machinery, power plants, there are only two pages in my passport that have any room for more stamps."

As a teenager, he learned the fundamentals of geometry, metrology and machine tool construction while working at a small machine tool reconditioning shop. The shop specialized in older generation gear hobbers. He credits this experience with taking his love for both art and industry in an entirely new direction.

"As with all my sculptures, whether gear-like or not, I begin by removing stock until a desirable overall external mass is achieved. Open space in sculpture can be just as powerful as solid mass. My intent is to create non-frontal sculptures that can be viewed on all sides. I always look for lines while sculpting. Lines define the action of each piece, and are a signature to the fluidity of my work."

It's rare to find a sculptor showing his work at a gear exhibition, but Barker believes the venue is a perfect fit. "It's a lot easier for my work to catch an interested eye when standing alone rather than in the midst of competition. People get over-stimulated at art shows and sculptural exhibitions. I like the concept of placing non-functional art in the midst of market-driven industrial machinery."

No matter the direction his art takes him, Barker believes industry does not get the attention it deserves in today's society.

"Back when my grandfather was in school, it was taught that mining, manufacturing and agriculture were the foundation of all economic commerce. No matter how you break it down, those three things are still at the basis of any country's sustenance, wealth generation and sovereignty. Today's schools just teach (or drug) children to be easily managed citizens. Most have discontinued their shop classes and sold or scrapped the school's wood and metal working machinery. Students are literally being taught that industrialization is bad for the earth.

The job of an artist is to communicate—with beauty. I try to harmonize industry and nature with my gear-themed sculptures, bringing attention to the usefulness of man's creations as well as the Creator's."

A gallery of Barker's work can be found online at www.salembarker.com.

