



## ED ZELENAK

### *Divining the Immeasurable*

May has been dubbed Ed Zelenak month in London by the Michael Gibson Gallery—they will exhibit his new celestial-themed works there May 14th-30th, while Museum London will host, starting May 2nd, a retrospective exhibition of his sculptures and other work made between 1960 and 2011. In an April interview the West Lorne based artist shared some thoughts on his explorations and expressions of life through art.

"I recall drawing even before I started school," Ed says. "My father had a talent for art, so I suppose it was in my DNA." In the rural public school he attended in West Elgin, the teacher, Harvey Garbut, encouraged Ed and childhood friend Walter Redinger, to draw.

That early encouragement was the start of a lifetime career which blossomed in the atmosphere of Beal Tech's flourishing art program where a number of the professors were immersed in the world of art and exerted considerable influence on their

students. Studying further at the Ontario College of Art and Design (1957-59) Ed remembers, "Jock McDonald was one of the most memorable even though he talked about everything but art."

Ed next travelled to Texas where he studied at the Fort Worth Art Centre and Barsch Kelly Atelier in Dallas. He experienced for the first time working as a painter in a studio while doing odd jobs to survive. He met and took part in one of Claes Oldenburg's performance art productions. "I touched base with a 'real art guy from New York' and experienced people with a sense of contemporary art."

Upon returning to West Lorne, and with funds procured in part from work in area tobacco fields, Ed and Walter built two independent, self-contained large studios with two tiny apartments under one roof. These work spaces afforded each artist the opportunity to develop their individual, and vastly different approaches to the art aesthetic. With expanding families, and the need for more living

space Ed built his present studio and home in 1975 on his mother-in-law's farm.

In the late 60s and early 70s support from the Canada Council for the Arts extended to greater numbers of artists in a broader range of mediums and processes. The base of London Regional artists grew and was energized by talents from within and outside the region. Both Ed and Walter grabbed attention and recognition for large-scale sculpture, including many installations in public places.

These large works were investigations of materials (including wood and fibreglass), form, space and light—Ed considers them to have been an important stage in his development. However, he says, "Large works are overwhelming—the scale can derail a person—I wanted to get more hands on, to reveal more of who I am."

Ed began a shift into exploration of subjects and themes which are universal in nature, a study which has had both a forward and cyclical momentum.



Above: *Locating Its Other Self #2*, 2006, tin on copper, 21 x 15.5"; *Levitation as Witnessed by 42 Ciphers*, 2010, alloyed tin on copper, 84 x 78"; Opposite: *Levitation—26 Pauses*, 2012-2013, alloyed tin on copper, 48 x 208.25"

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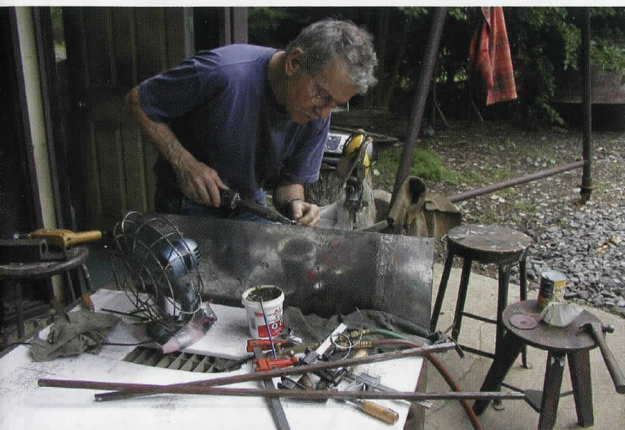
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*Ed Zelenak at his West Lorne studio*

"My work tends to work like a spoke. It goes out and then there will be an axiom and a corollary and it links that way. And then I go back to the hub. And then on to the next wheel."

As a sculptor and maker, seeking to explore questions related to life's meaning, he was determined to get below the surface of things, to drill downwards and to work in the most basic of materials. He chose lead, copper and bronze—compressed, condensed materials rooted in human technological history. He was attracted to the activity of shaping, casting, welding and cutting the metals, and to the traces of the process which resided in the final object.

He says, "One piece in the Museum London show is called Petrarch's Climb. Now Petrarch didn't climb the mountain-top because of his ego . . . but being about forty when I was doing this I was at the apex of my 'go out there and get them' energy . . . so to me it's probably about one's ego. One of the three sections is three and a half tons of metal, sixteen feet in diameter, about a foot off the ground. People might ask, 'Why isn't it made out of paper Mache?' Well climbing a mountain is a pretty hefty project. So the material needs to match that. When you are making work you also have to be aware of the issues of your tools and the processes. In

order to get it into a gallery, it has to be very low—so to have weight it has to be out of something that is very heavy."

He believes that his job as an artist is to go beyond externalities. "I don't trust the eye. If something is determined by eye only then you end up with the goods which deal with only the external-ness of it. By that I mean, if you lay out some colours and you don't like it and you put it upside down and it looks better . . . so who is the judgement caller in

that? It's the eye. And if you are looking at really profound things you have to get beneath the skin of that. It has to shine through." Over his career he has made limited use of colour as it is "just the skin".

Ed has used his materials and tools to explore, ponder, suggest, comment, analyze and observe. He has asked the questions of where we are and who we are, and investigated the seen and the unseen, the measurable and the unmeasurable, the interplay of intuition and logic, and often the dualities to be found in life.

Tables have appeared and re-appeared in his work over the years. Tables were inset with a vase containing a branch. "What are they? I simply wanted to make a statement which put the audience in a situation where they would have to question and come to a conclusion whether they are looking at a picture or an object. In the true sense it's an object. It's a table; it exists in space. But when you look at it, what are you drawn to? You're going to be drawn to the core point which is in front of it looking down and you see a picture of a vase with a branch in it. But really sculpture was meant to be in the whole, all in the round. So I am trying to ply that area of in-between-ness, the duality, all of the time."

Ed's work has taken form as sculpture, wall pieces, most often with sculptural elements, and graphics,





or combinations where one relates to the other in intriguing ways. He says, "Graphics fill a void for me—they help make my work more elastic, and allow me to render between ideas."

*Above: Levitation—Tracking #5, 2014, tin, copper, dry pigment, 30 x 24"*

*Opposite page (clockwise from top left): Dowsing the Edge of Emptiness—Concave #1, 2004, copper, bronze, 15 x 30"; Table #3—Still Life with Divining Rod, 2003-2005, wood, bronze, 72 x 60 x 30"; Table #2—Still Life with Divining Rod (detail), steel, 1998-2005; Vase—Still Life with Divining Rod, 2008, bronze ed. 1 of 3, 18.75 x 13.75 x 7.5"*

The Levitation series consists of panels of sections with sculptural elements—somewhat like paintings in sculpture. In explaining why they are sectional, he notes, "You have probably many times where you stop and you take stock or you take your pulse, a sense of yourself . . . and each time is slightly different. So there are a number of these, and it's like a picture seen on a rolling screen, like film. That serialization has been used frequently in my work."

Ed has employed the iconography of trees, stairs, dowsing rods and vessels, and his personal interests in mapping, measurement and travel, for his explorations. Symbols are utilized as forms of expression—but they often become vehicles to further investigation.

He became intrigued with divining rods when he and wife Clara called in the services of a dowser to locate water on their new property. Clara could dowse for water; Ed chose to dowse and divine in the studio. . . with metal, paper, canvas and wood. He saw the divining rod as a tool of discovery and orientation. The divining branch also represented an intriguing metaphor for his interest in the rational vs the unknown. The vessel, as symbol,

embodies the dualism of the exterior and the interior, of immobility and fluidity. Another recurring image has been a five-sided 'house' or gable shape used in different ways. "I reinvent myself by the use of that shape repeatedly; the shape has a variety of potentialities—straight up is grounded, on its side is an arrow. I come back to the shape to be re-grounded."

Through evocative forms and materials, Ed Zelenak's creations draw the viewer in for a closer look. He says, "I think in the broadest sense my work aspires to co-share with viewers things which are important to a very broad spectrum of life." May's exhibitions will show artwork completed over more than fifty years at Ed's rural studio. It's a unique opportunity for the public to enjoy and share.

*Ed Zelenak's work is included in the collections of the National Gallery of Canada; Art Gallery of Ontario; Musee Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland; Czech Museum of Fine Arts, Prague; the Chicago Athenaeum, Chicago; and The Ukrainian Museum, New York. "Ed Zelenak: Divining the Immeasurable" runs May 2nd to August 16th at Museum London, with an opening reception on May 22nd. A scholarly catalogue surveying his work, with emphasis on his recent work, theory and symbolism will be released in June. On Sun June 28th at 1pm Museum London will host an exhibition tour with Ed and Curator of Art, Cassie Getty. Ed will also be showing work at the Christopher Cutts Gallery in Toronto from June 6th-24th. The Michael Gibson Gallery is located at 157 Carling St, London ([www.gibsongallery.com](http://www.gibsongallery.com)). Find out more about Ed's work at [www.edzelenak.com](http://www.edzelenak.com).*



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