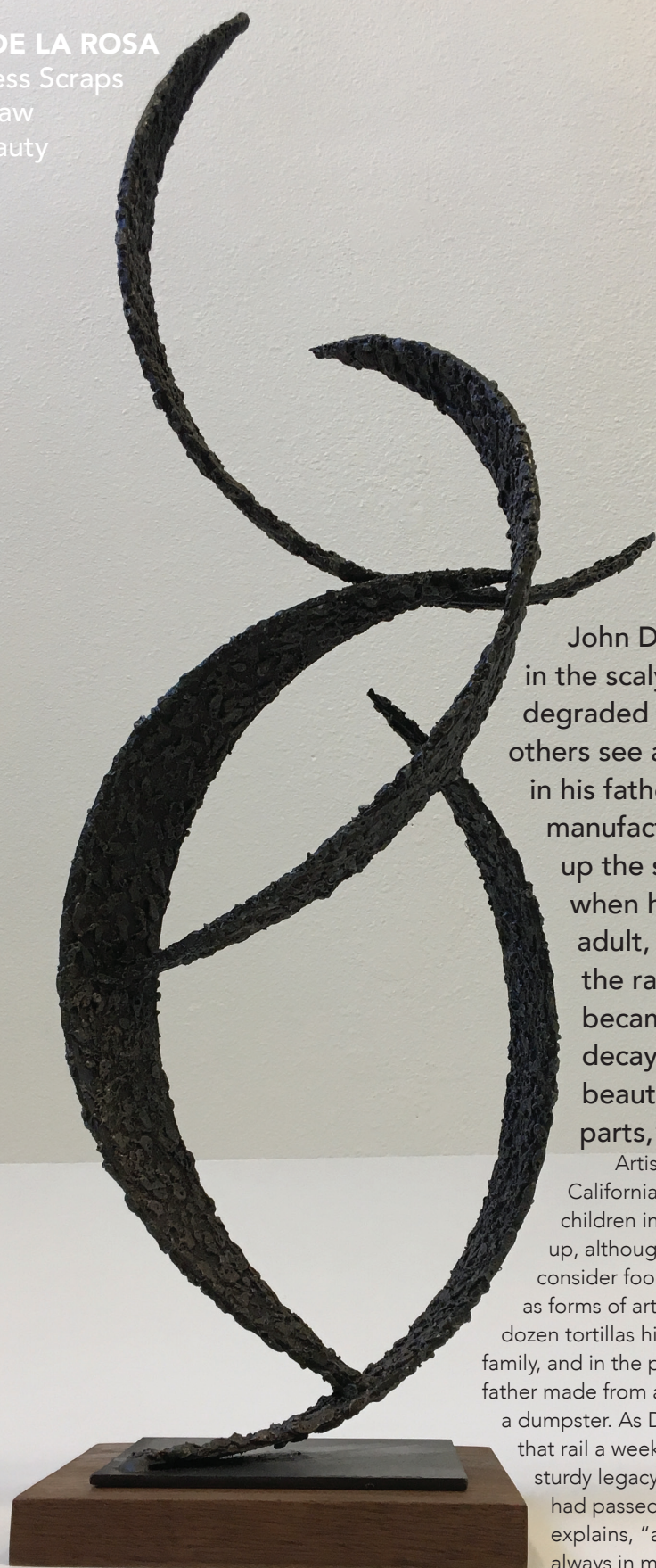


# PRECIOUS METALS

Artist **JOHN DE LA ROSA**  
Welds Worthless Scraps  
into Brutally Raw  
Objects of Beauty



John De La Rosa finds beauty in the scaly, pockmarked and degraded metal shards that others see as scrap. As a welder in his father's generations-old manufacturing business, he swept up the same junk off the floors when he was a boy. But as an adult, the parallels between the raw metal and his own life became clear. "We all rust, we decay, and we can become beautiful from the broken parts," he remarks.

Artistic beauty is something that California native De La Rosa, one of 10 children in a Latino family, saw growing up, although not in the traditional sense. "I consider food, music and so many other things as forms of art," he says. He saw it in the 12 dozen tortillas his mother made each day for the family, and in the porch rail on their home that his father made from a zigzag piece of metal pulled from a dumpster. As De La Rosa the sculptor leaned on that rail a week after his father's death, he felt the sturdy legacy that his father and grandfather had passed down to him. "It was art," he explains, "and so in many ways, it was always in me."

written by Linda L. McAllister

photos courtesy of  
A La Mod, Palm Springs

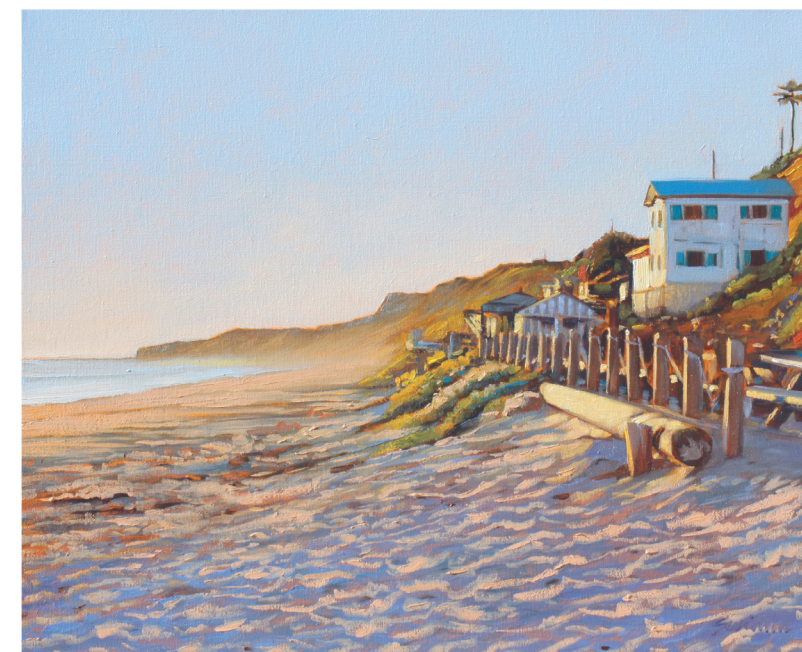


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Images:  
Flow, oil on paper, 45.5"x57.5"  
Bait Ball Day, woodcut monotype, 30"x30"

## TOM SWIMM

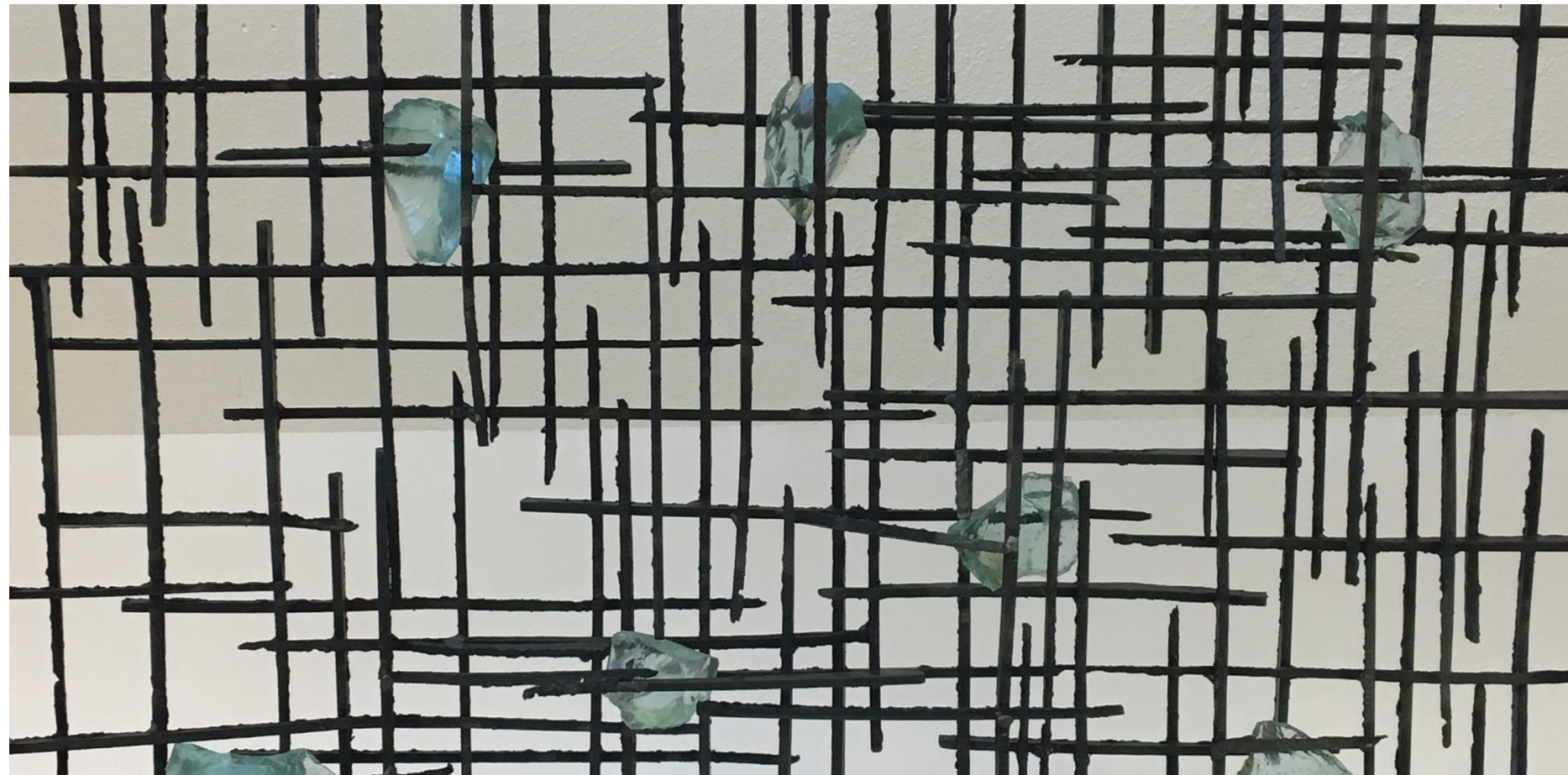


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Comfortable for years as a welder fusing metals, De La Rosa found it uncomfortable calling himself a sculptor. He credits his partner, landscape historian Steven Keylon, with first giving him the title, and his friend, American minimalist poet Aram Saroyan, with urging him to do what he loves—and sell it. So on weekends when the metal shop was closed and he was alone, De La Rosa began digging through his stash of torch-cut scraps, some dating back to the 1960s when the business was new, to create beauty from something that most people dismissed as worthless. Those scraps “sort of represent how we all change in some beautiful way,” he suggests.

From New York collectors to Palm Springs art aficionados and eBay aesthetes, folks have taken notice of De La Rosa’s raw, Brutalist designs. When he sold his first sculpture, he was amazed that a stranger actually understood him. “They got what I was doing,” he says. “The money didn’t matter to me, just the fact that someone paid for ... a concept that came out of my head.” Much as his father used to awaken thinking of new ways to fix a piece of machinery, De La Rosa says his best ideas come just before he’s fully conscious, in that gauzy, magical twilight zone. “I get a vision for a piece, and then I don’t rest until I can create what I saw,” he explains. “I never create a new piece of metal to fill a gap in my vision; I go out and find it.”



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De La Rosa's favorite scraps are those that have been driven over (and over again) by forklifts and other heavy machinery so that they are bent. And battered. And bruised. Though simple, sweeping lines defined De La Rosa's earliest work, he's graduated to manipulating the metal more and more to get an ideal texture that enhances the form. He describes the slow, painstaking process this way: "Before welders at the factory start to weld, they tap their guns at the side of the table, which creates a build-up of metal. After years and years ... a sort of swallow's nest of metal has formed over time and inspired me. I now work in a process that gives me a lava-like texture by turning the gas off on the welding torch."

De La Rosa, who's 54, splits his time between Palm Springs and his workplace just east of Los Angeles. He is now a grandfather, and like the generations of welders—and artists—before him, he wants to leave this little girl a legacy. "My biggest fear in life is to be mundane," he muses. "Worse than dying. I wanted to let [my granddaughter] know that I was here, to leave something tangible behind."

From the misunderstood outsider who says that some in his family made him feel like a freak when he began sculpting scrap metal to the wholly complete artist, father, grandfather and partner—John De La Rosa has cast a beautiful legacy. 📸



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