

New Jersey

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Artist Fashions 'Impossible' Shadows Out of Tangled Steel | New Jersey Monthly

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[Larry Kagan](#) isn't a magician, but his artwork makes you wonder: *How did he do that?*

When lit, Kagan's abstract steel sculptures reveal defined shadows of everyday objects, such as a chair or a dress shoe, and images of familiar figures, including Barack Obama and Andy Warhol.

The Montclair Art Museum's exhibit "[Impossible Shadows: The Art of Larry Kagan](#)" comprises 21 of Kagan's pieces, on view through January 5, 2020.

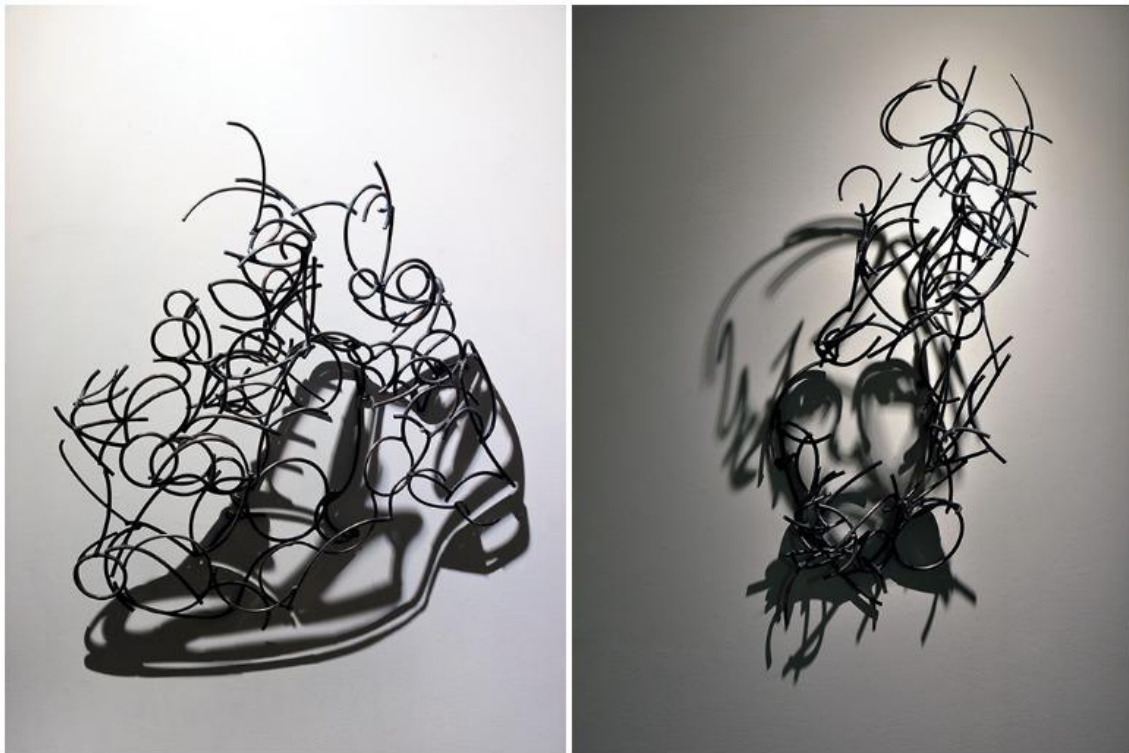
Unlike most illusionists, Kagan is willing to divulge his secrets.

He begins with a light beam. During hours of trial and error, he bends and welds pieces of steel until the desired shadow is cast. "The relationship between the steel and the shadow are as far apart as I can get them," he says.

At Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, Kagan initially studied engineering, but graduated with an English degree. He also holds a master's degree in studio arts from the

University of Albany.

When he first started making steel sculptures, shadows were “an unwanted byproduct.” Later they became the focal point of his work. “People basically know that they’re there,” Kagan says about shadows, “but they kind of ignore them.”



From left: *Oxford*, 2011; *Andy*, 2016. Courtesy of Gary Gold Photography

Gail Stavitsky, MAM chief curator, was fascinated when she saw Kagan’s piece *Box II* at the OK Harris Gallery in Manhattan. “I thought he had painted the image on the wall,” she says. “I kept sticking my hand there and trying to figure out how he did it.” That piece is now part of MAM’s permanent collection.

On October 24, the museum will present a conversation between Kagan and Brian Scholl, a psychology professor at Yale University, about how the mind constructs our visual world.

Kagan's family history during World War II is a key influence. His parents were Holocaust survivors, but most relatives were wiped out. Kagan was born in a refugee camp after the war.

Shadows are Kagan's means of expressing the impermanence of life. "Working with shadows has in some way captured my feelings about reality," he says. "It's pretty temporary. Neither here nor there."

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