

# Montclair Art Museum Presents "Impossible Shadows: The Art of Larry Kagan"

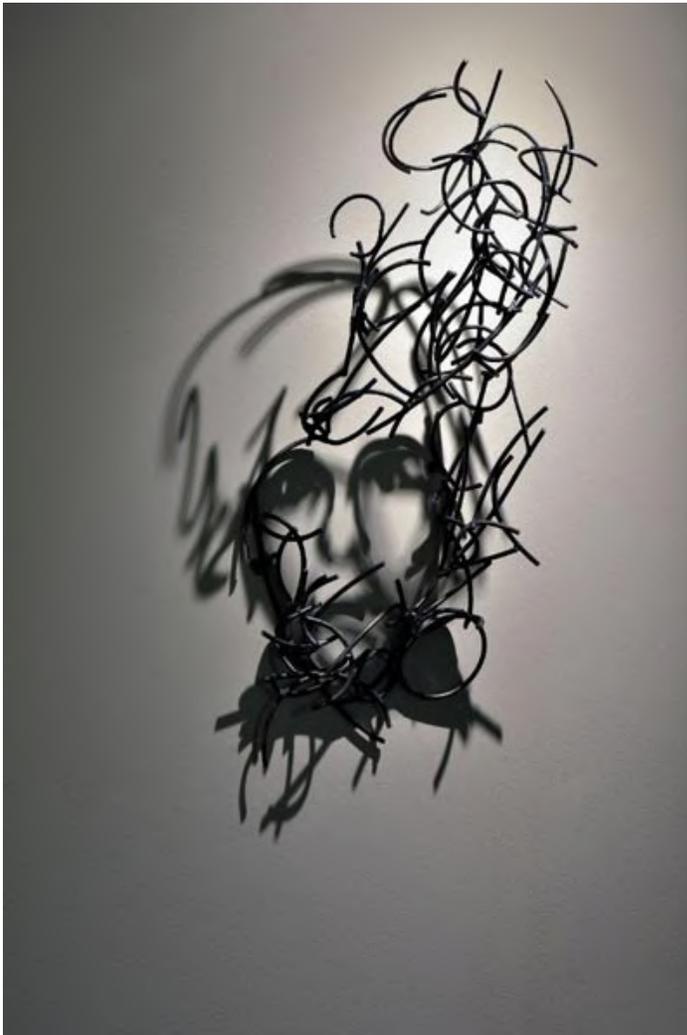
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Montclair Art Museum Presents

"Impossible Shadows: The Art of Larry Kagan"



(MONTCLAIR, NJ)

-- Impossible Shadows: The Art of Larry Kagan, a new fall 2019 exhibition at the Montclair Art Museum (MAM), showcases the veteran artist's provocative sculptures made of twisted steel with seemingly impossible shadows, inviting the viewer to question the very nature of reality and the process of seeing. The MAM exhibition is Kagan's first solo exhibition in the State of New Jersey and one of his few museum shows in the tri-state region. It will be on view at MAM September 14, 2019 through January 5, 2020.



The exhibition will feature 21 of Kagan's most notable works, each inviting a discussion about dualities of light and dark, drawing and sculpture, abstraction and representation, and what is two-dimensional and three-dimensional. Viewed without lighting, the pieces look like abstract metal sculptures. With special lighting, the sculptures' shadows form a range of images from Barack Obama to a man's dress shoe.

Kagan sees himself in the pop art tradition of working with popular imagery. He describes his creative process as drawing in space "by creating structures that cast inappropriate shadows." These sublime sculptures do not fully yield their secrets, and that is part of the mystery and magic of their creation and existence.

Among the thousands of works in the Montclair Art Museum's collection, one of the visitors' favorites is Larry Kagan's *Box II* (2001). On view in the Ferber stairway since 2006, this enigmatic work continues to mystify viewers who wonder how an abstract bronze sculpture can cast a realistic shadow of an open box with perspective. One guest observed, "I was completely moved and astounded by it and could have looked at it all day."

Larry Kagan (b.1946) is a Professor Emeritus at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) in Troy, New York. Born two years after the end of World War II in a refugee camp in Germany, Kagan connects his art to the heavy toll of the Holocaust on his Jewish family from Belarus.

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“It just wiped us out,” he said. “Working with shadows represents missing relatives. I grew up with a lot of holes in my family tree. Something about shadows relates to impermanence and something that isn’t there.”

Kagan emigrated to the United States at age 13, and dreamed of becoming a NASA engineer. While he created mostly mechanical drawings in his youth, as an undergraduate student at RPI in 1964, Kagan found that he did not want to focus his career on engineering or architecture. He took an etching class at the University of Albany, and discovered the freedom of making art. Here Kagan was mentored by art professor and renowned sculptor Richard Stankiewicz and earned a Master’s degree in studio arts in 1970. Kagan’s observed how his professor hung his welded steel constructions on the wall, “leaving their interior elements energized.”

Light and shadow have played roles in Kagan’s work since the early 1970s. The artist credits his dog with reintroducing him to steel during their walks in Tribeca, New York in the early 1980s. These canine investigations of piles of construction debris yielded intriguing colors and textures in the found, broken, and bent pieces of steel. Kagan gathered materials to weld into free-form shapes that tended to fade into the background when exhibited next to colorful paintings in the gallery. Mounting his sculptures on the walls, he discovered that the gallery lights produced strong shadows that distorted their shapes. By trial and error, he figured out how to incorporate the shadows, as active components of his sculptures.

Over the past 25 years, Kagan has worked with magical combinations of steel and shadow. The imagery in Kagan's work is drawn from art history and popular culture, as well as his everyday environment: his studio, readings, daily media, and the internet. Kagan prefers familiar images that suggest volume and perspective. He generally finds the images, lets them simmer over time, and draws or projects them on paper or directly on the studio wall. Kagan then builds them as shadow imagery from welded pieces of steel.

"The way to capture viewers' attention is to create visual information that they can connect with, said Kagan. "I deal with simple, everyday forms is because people can ...identify and relate to them. I like the idea that I am opening up a new way of seeing and understanding the world."

Impossible Shadows: The Art of Larry Kagan is coordinated by Gail Stavitsky, Montclair Art Museum's chief curator and Alison Van Denend, curatorial assistant. This special exhibition is located in the Weston and Elevator Lobby galleries.

[Montclair Arts Museum](#) is located at 3 South Mountain Avenue in Montclair, New Jersey.