

Published July 17, 2017 2:27PM / Updated July 19, 2017 9:15AM

## SMALLEY, David Allen

### Lyman Allyn exhibition remembers late local artist David Smalley

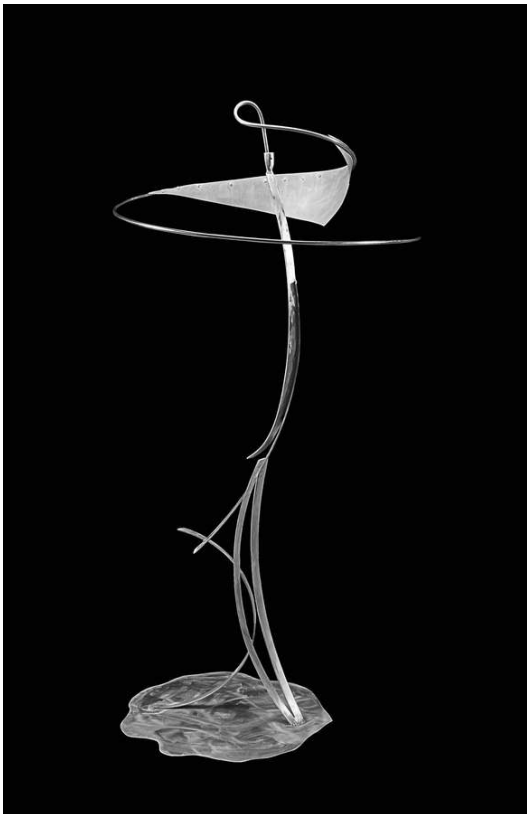
By Mary Biekert

Stationary. Unmovable. Still. That's what most people think when they hear "sculpture."

For late local artist David Smalley, however, sculpture often meant being kinetic — dependent on motion for effect — something that he hoped onlookers could interact with.

Sam Quigley, director of the Lyman Allyn Art Museum, recently demonstrated this theme among Smalley's marsh-grass-inspired sculptures, titled "Spartina," on display in the museum. He vigorously waved a hand-held fan, causing the tall strands of metal "grass," which otherwise remain balanced and still, to slowly sway.

This art form, Quigley says, was special and significant to Smalley. Not only was it a way to engage audiences, it also allowed Smalley to express his own "interpretation of existence." So, while a beloved art professor at Connecticut College, Smalley also helped students develop their own world view.



Dance of Life, 2004. Stainless Steel

"He helped students to open their eyes and to learn the powers of art. He may not have been Jeff Koons or an acclaimed New York-based studio artist, but he influenced hundreds, if not thousands, of students by helping them learn the power of art. His influence over this region of the country was far-reaching," Quigley says.

Smalley's ability to both observe and influence is explored in a retrospective of his life works through the "David Smalley Memorial Exhibition," in both an indoor and outdoor display at the Lyman Allyn, which will be held until Aug. 13.

Sculptures ranging from pieces that Quigley describes as "brutalistic and heavy" to ones that are delicate and refined are highlighted both inside the museum and over the surrounding 750-acre Connecticut College campus. Smalley's larger works will be on outdoor display until Oct. 29 in the "David Smalley Sculpture Trail Exhibition," which was organized by the museum and college.

Remembered as a notable sculptor from southeastern Connecticut, Smalley was also an art professor at Connecticut College from 1965 to 2002, where he specialized in sculpture, virtual reality and multi-media design. He died in 2015 at age 74 of idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis.

He grew up in New London and graduated from New London High School. He earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Connecticut and his master's in fine art from Indiana University. While a professor at Conn College, he primarily lived in Niantic with his family.

Long interested in combining creativity with technology, Smalley pioneered using computer technology as a tool for creating sculpture, and he founded the Ammerman Center for Arts and Technology at Connecticut College.

His bell-jar series displayed in the Lyman Allyn exhibition is an example of the type of innovative works and ideas that he brought to his students. His creations of miniature dystopic industrial landscapes, which he designed through 3D printing in 2002, showcase Smalley's propensity to experiment with methods that were considered avant-garde at the time.

The coastal region of southeastern Connecticut also proved to be a large source of inspiration for Smalley. His "Spartina" series showcases this, but also, in his sea-wreck-inspired series, Smalley worked with bronze to create the appearance of ships gracefully withering away under the pressures of the ocean.

Having had his art displayed in dozens of exhibitions in the United States and throughout the world, including a mid-career retrospective at the Lyman Allyn in 1997, Smalley also partook in collaborations with renowned local sculptors such as Gilbert Boro and Alvin Sher.

"He is a part of a group that influences our perception of artistic outdoor sculpture, and by being a teacher, he was a great observer, and he was part and parcel of the great art movements of the 20th century," Quigley says.

His series of stainless steel works exemplify his participation in the late 20th-century movement of marrying kinetic sculpture with minimalism, Quigley says.

"But what's interesting about these is that you can still clearly see that Smalley was trying to have his presence come through in these works," Quigley says, as he points out left-over marks from a seemingly unfinished sanding job and the ragged metal edges that lined many of the pieces.

For a memorial exhibition, however, it all felt fitting.

"They're really minimal, elegant, Zen-like," Quigley says. "And they're reminiscent of something. Maybe it's cartoons in *The New Yorker* or sculptures on the streets of New York. But somehow, feeling his presence come through in the works is all very comforting."