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Engineering Art

UNH's Ganson Exhibition Merges Art and Science

By [Tracy Manforte](#)
UNH News Bureau

DURHAM, N.H. -- Art and science are subjects worlds apart. The free-thinking process of one sharply contrasts with the strict formulas of the other. Those who enjoy art usually loathe science, and vice versa.

Then there's Arthur Ganson. The New England artist has defied logic and made a professional career by merging the two.

Ganson's sculptures will be on display at the University of New Hampshire Art Gallery March 25 through April 25 in "Thoughtful Mechanisms: The Lyrical Engineering of Arthur Ganson." A preview reception is planned Friday, March 24, from 5 to 7 p.m., in the Paul Creative Arts Center. The exhibition and related events are free and open to the public.

A 1978 alumnus of the UNH fine arts program, Ganson originally enrolled as a pre-med student. He soon realized, however, that his mind was not well-suited for storing facts and figures, and quickly transferred to the art department, where he felt more at home.

According to Arthur Balderacchi, UNH professor of art and art history, Ganson's metal sculptures and engineered machines made waves in the department. "Even as a student, Ganson had an intellectual sense of humor, which certainly is seen in his work today."

Ganson recalls his boyhood interest in the strange, inventive contraptions featured in Dr. Seuss's children's books as an early artistic influence. That connection remains obvious as the Stoneham, Mass., resident creates machines that range from complex wire silhouettes to heavy steel constructions. The sculptures are manually activated or set into motion by electric motors. A self-taught mechanical engineer, Ganson continues to learn by trial and error while pushing the

laws of physics.

In *Smithsonian Magazine*, writer David Sims describes Ganson's work as "retrotechnology with a 19th-century quality. No lasers, no subminiaturized computer wizardry. What you see is what you get." This graceful combination of art and science produces something for everyone. Children are impressed by the playful features, while art connoisseurs appreciate the detail and mechanics of each sculpture.

"Every decision has a mechanical, functional factor, as well as an aesthetic, gestural component," says Ganson. "I don't know where the ideas come from, but there are many conversations I continually have in my head. Some ideas develop from earlier machines; others are new thoughts. The best ones are accidental."

Ganson is currently artist-in residence at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Jane Pickering, director of the MIT Museum, says his work is inspirational to students perfecting their own technical innovations. "Machines are usually covered up in a sleek little box and one rarely sees how they actually work," she says. "In Ganson's sculptures, the inner workings are the main event. He shows how elegant a machine can be."

"Thoughtful Mechanisms: The Lyrical Engineering of Arthur Ganson" is organized by the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College. Its presentation at UNH is funded by the Friends of The Art Gallery.

Calendar of Events

The ArtBreak Series runs Wednesdays, noon to 1 p.m. All events take place in The Art Gallery unless otherwise noted.

March 22 -- Scenes from Mary Gallagher's "Farther Along," directed by David Kaye, UNH asst. professor of theatre and dance. Paul Creative Arts Center, room A-219.

March 29 -- Gallery talk with Arthur Ganson, exhibiting artist.

April 5 -- Classical guitar with Theo Mazur and Isaac

Bustos, UNH music students.

April 12 -- Poetry reading by UNH English graduate students Elizabeth Antalek, Dianne Moses, Shelly Girdner and Kimberly Cloutier-Green.

April 19 -- "Blackness in Portraits of Pushkin," a lecture by independent scholar Richard Borden, Ph.D., Paul Creative Arts Center, room A-219, 12:15 to 1:30 p.m.

Gallery hours are: Monday - Wednesday, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., Thursday, 10 a.m. - 8 p.m., Saturday and Sunday, 1 - 5 p.m. The gallery is closed Fridays and university holidays, including April 23. School and group tours are offered free with advance reservation and can be scheduled by calling the Outreach Program at 603-862-3713. For more information, call 603-862-3712 or email art.gallery@unh.edu.

EDITORS and NEWS DIRECTORS: For slides or photos, contact Amanda Tappan, publicity coordinator, at 603-862-3713.

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