

an arts and crafts gallery. "I decided to go for it," he recalls.

The group formed River Gallery in Independence, 15 miles southwest of Salem, which is now in its third full year of operation. "That was the first professional venue for my work," he says.

Smith considers that he has been reborn, as a gay man and an artist. He and Amidon since have moved to Portland. "Now I am an artist and a homemaker," he declares with a grin.

He makes his small bronze statues in his home studio. "I don't view my art as having any deep, philosophical messages. I just do them to please my own sensibilities. When I do male nudes, I feel erotic. It's no deeper than that."

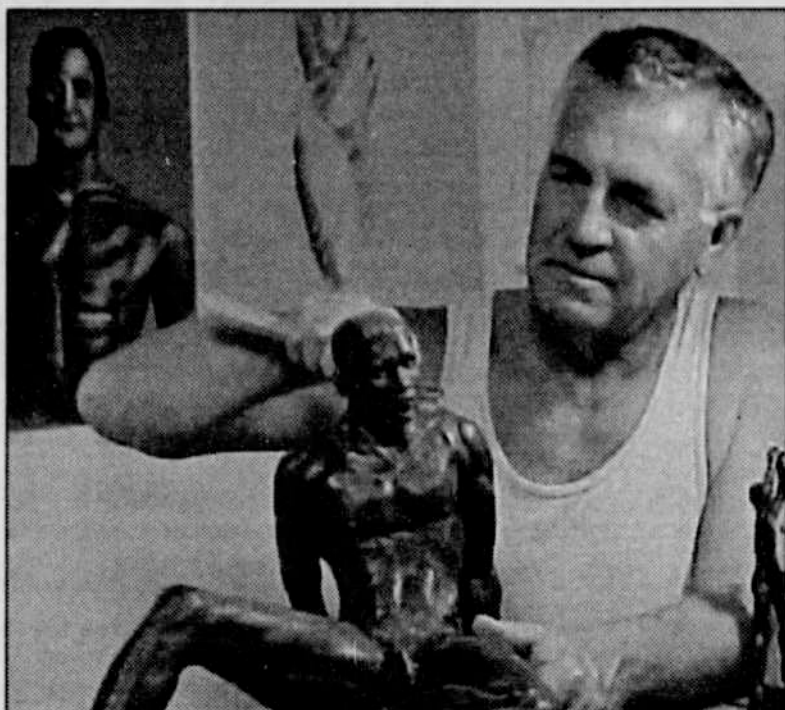
The little bronze men are all about 12 to 18 inches tall. A few of his early works show definite stylization, twisted figures and bulging muscles.

Smith says, "I am pretty much a realist/impressionist." All are nude, and he says they are as realistic as he can make them; many even sport erections.

In fact, that anatomical detail led directly to his first big Internet sale. He was contacted by a couple who have three galleries in Beverly Hills and Hollywood, and while on the phone with the dealer who was looking at his Web site, the guy said of one sculpture, "It looks like this young man has an erection." When Smith affirmed that, the dealer responded, "Well, good, my client likes that."

Smith says, "We ended up taking four sculptures there in carry-on baggage, and he sold three of them to his anonymous client, who only collects male nudes."

Although the end results are diminutive, the process of creating them is long and complex. The first step is to sculpt the image in clay, then do a high-temperature firing.



Gary Smith puts the finishing touches on a sculpture

Next, Smith makes a liquid rubber mold, which creates a negative impression of the sculpture. When that dries he makes a molten wax casting, which returns the image to its positive state.

The wax statue then is encased in a silicon dioxide substance, "rather like breading fish, only thicker," Smith notes.

That combination then is fired in a kiln so the outer substance hardens and the wax melts away, again leaving a negative mold.

Next, Smith heats bronze to 2,200 degrees in his homemade furnace and pours it into the mold. "It's a lot less expensive than sending work to a foundry but a lot more work," he explains.

When the metal solidifies, he breaks the ceramic shell with a hammer, revealing the bronze statue within. Smith does a lot of hand polishing and trimming, then heats the piece with a torch and sprays on various chemicals to change the color of the metal.

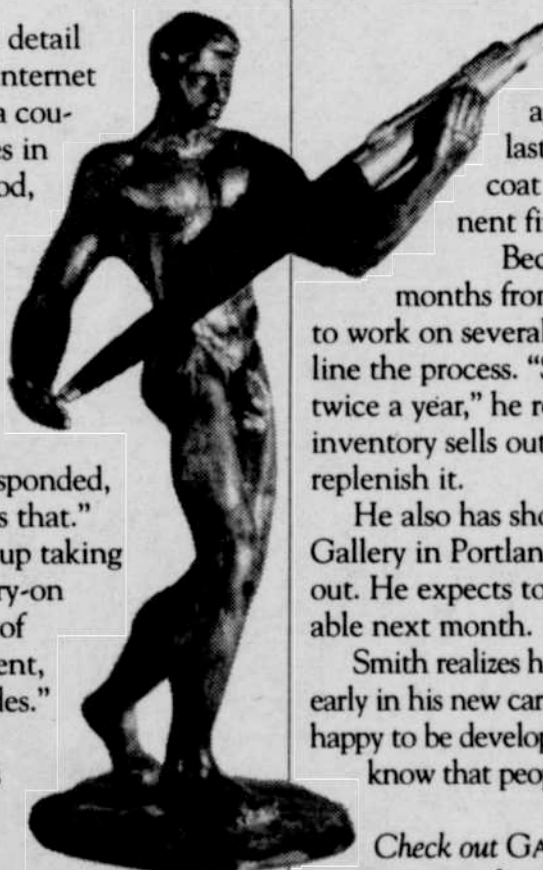
"What I'm really doing is simulating the process that would happen if it aged naturally," he adds. The last step is to give his men a coat of wax to protect the permanent finish.

Because it generally takes several months from start to finish, Smith likes to work on several pieces at a time to streamline the process. "So I only pour bronze about twice a year," he reveals, adding that once his inventory sells out it can take a while to replenish it.

He also has shown his work at Brian Marki Gallery in Portland, but his work there is sold out. He expects to have some new pieces available next month.

Smith realizes he's had some good fortune this early in his new career. "At this point I'm just happy to be developing a market. It's great to know that people want to buy my work."

Check out GARY SMITH online at www.garyfranc.com, and look for his work at Brian Marki Fine Art and Framing, 2236 N.E. Broadway.





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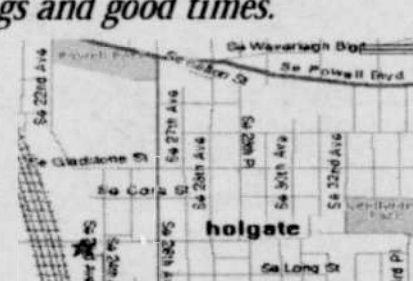
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