

Frog Sculptures by Beau Smith

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Introduction

For twenty-five years I have been a professional sculptor. I have been sculpting human-sized copper frogs. That's right. Human-sized copper frogs. I make other sizes of frogs as well, but the human-sized frogs are what I'm known for and how I got started. I have also made other creatures, and I plan in the future to give more attention to that. But, for the main, it has been frogs. I talk about that in the back of this book. I also talk about the materials, the process, the history of how it came to be that I started making frogs... I talk about all that and more.

My human-sized frog sculptures are in a lot of public places, and are appreciated by many. They are in parks, in front of banks, in downtown public areas, in botanical gardens... They have found their way into Europe and South America.

This book does not contain all the frogs I have ever built. But it does contain a lot of them and should give you a good idea of what I am capable of creating.

These frog sculptures are organized by theme and size. You'll see the big frogs first, then other sizes, all organized to theme.

Beverage Frogs















Book Frogs





















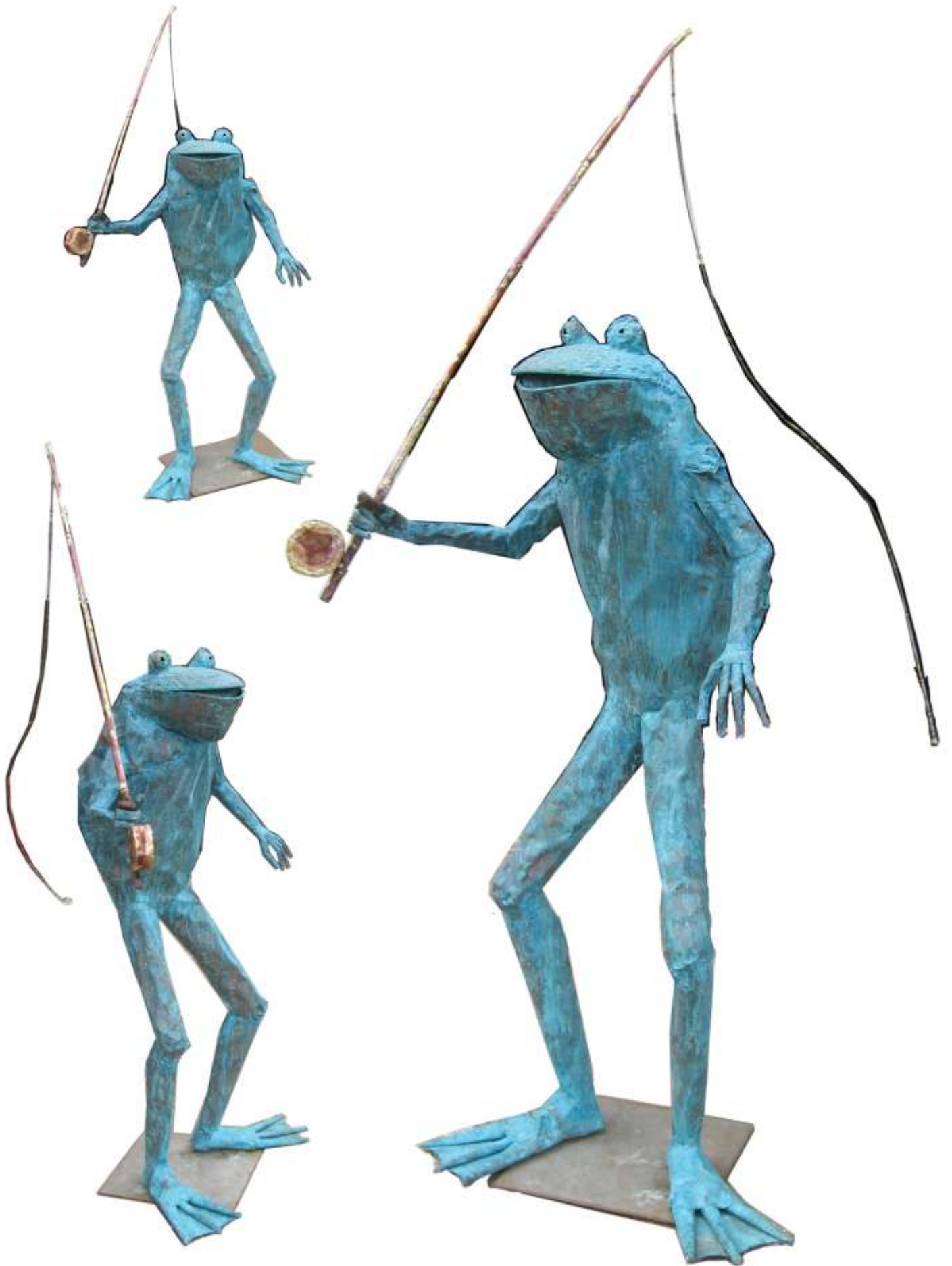






Fisherman

Frog



Frog Smelling a Flower





FROG AND FLOWER FOR
LES JARDENS DE
LAQUENEXY, A
BOTANICAL GARDENS
IN LAQUENEXY
FRANCE. BEAU SMITH
2011

Golfer Frogs





Frogs Hanging Out

























Lantern Frogs











Musical Frogs































Musical Frog Trios











American Gothic





Bird Watcher Frog



Card Playing Frogs



Leap Frogs



Meditating Frogs





Mother and Child



Peace Frog







Puppeteer Frog



Wizard Frog



Scarecrow Frog





Parent and Child Book Frogs















































Frog Couples









Lady Frog

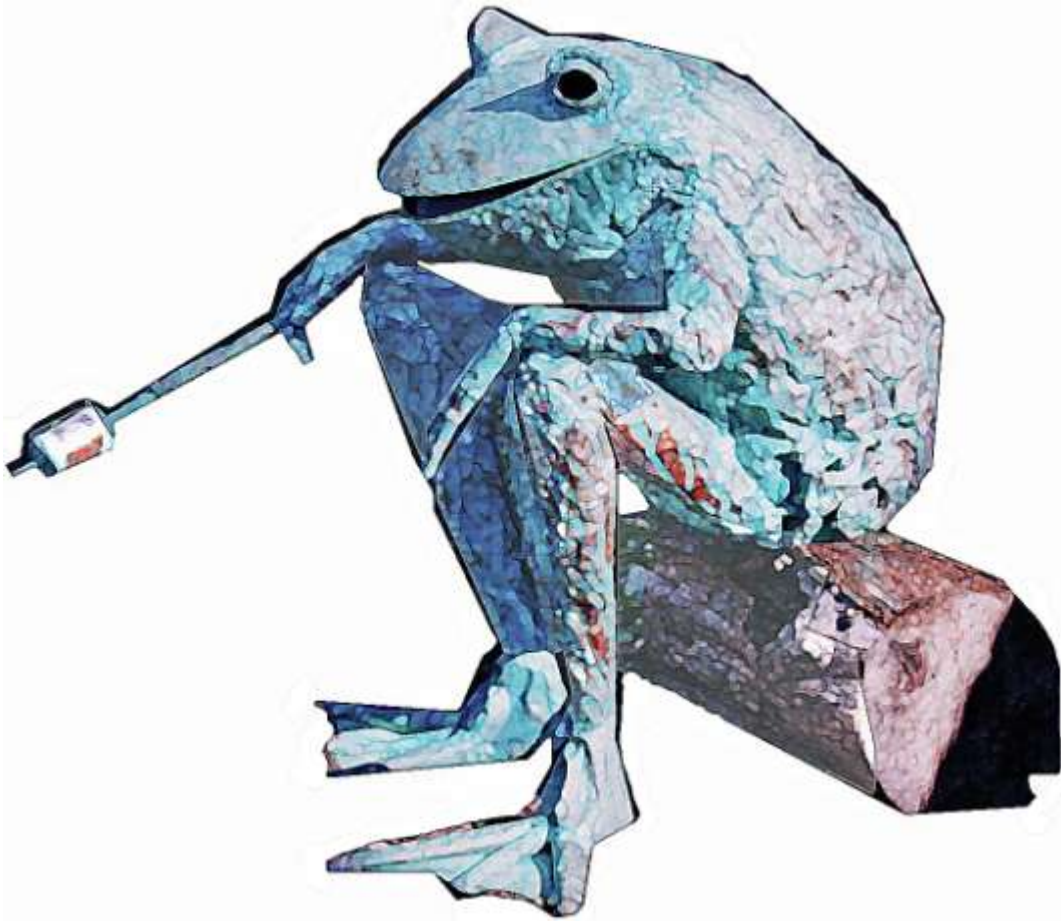








Storytelling Frog



Thinker Frog









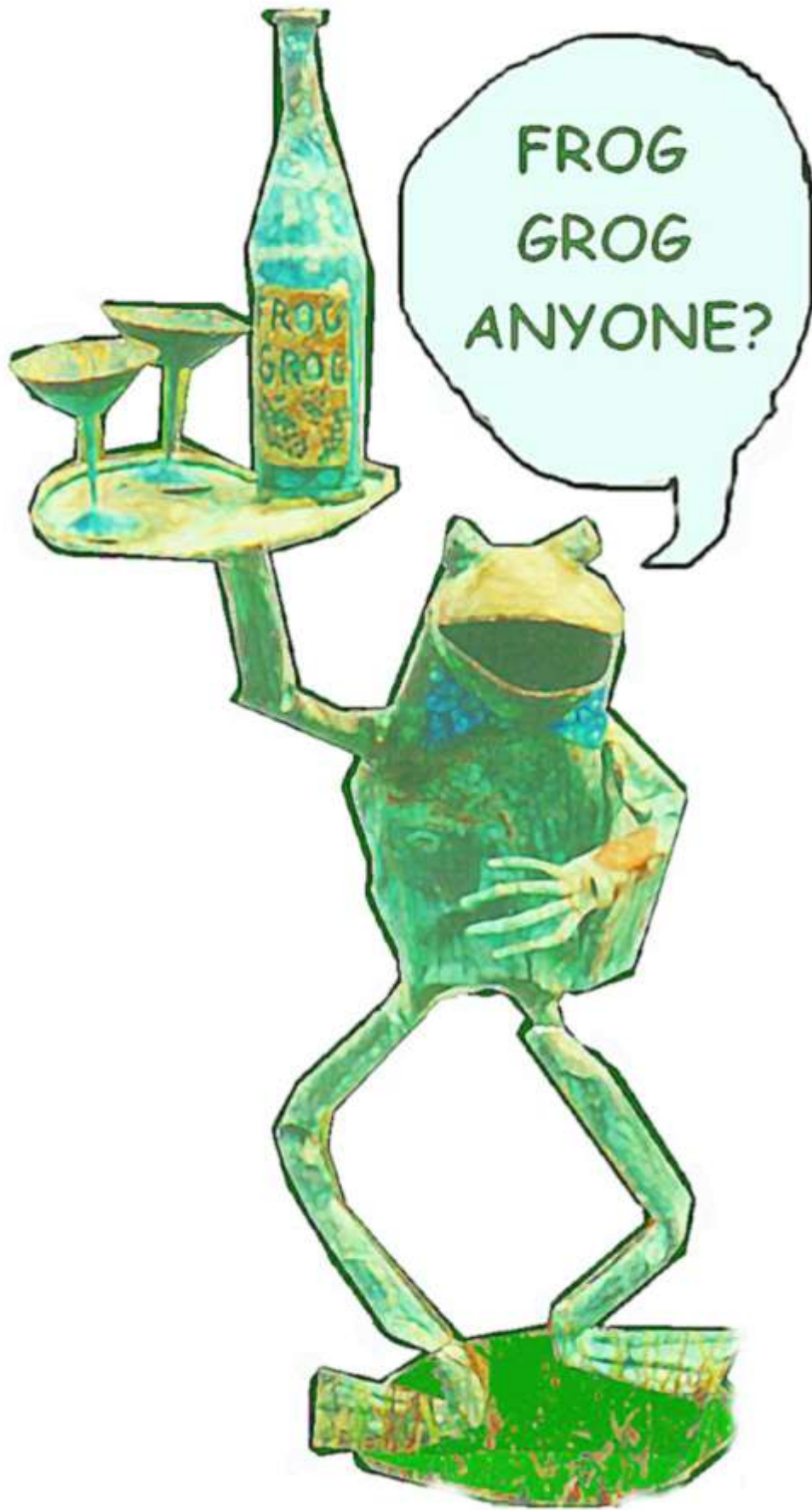


Waiter Frog









FROG
GROG
ANYONE?

Medium-Sized Frogs and Smaller

Artist Frog



Ballerina Frog



Beverage Frogs

























Frog Holding Bowl





Small Cowboy Frog



Frog on a Mushroom









Frog Golfers



Frogs Hanging Out





Martial Arts Frog



Musical Frogs













Panning for Gold Frog



Parent and Child Frogs



Rock 'n Roll Frog



Platter Frogs



Book Frogs



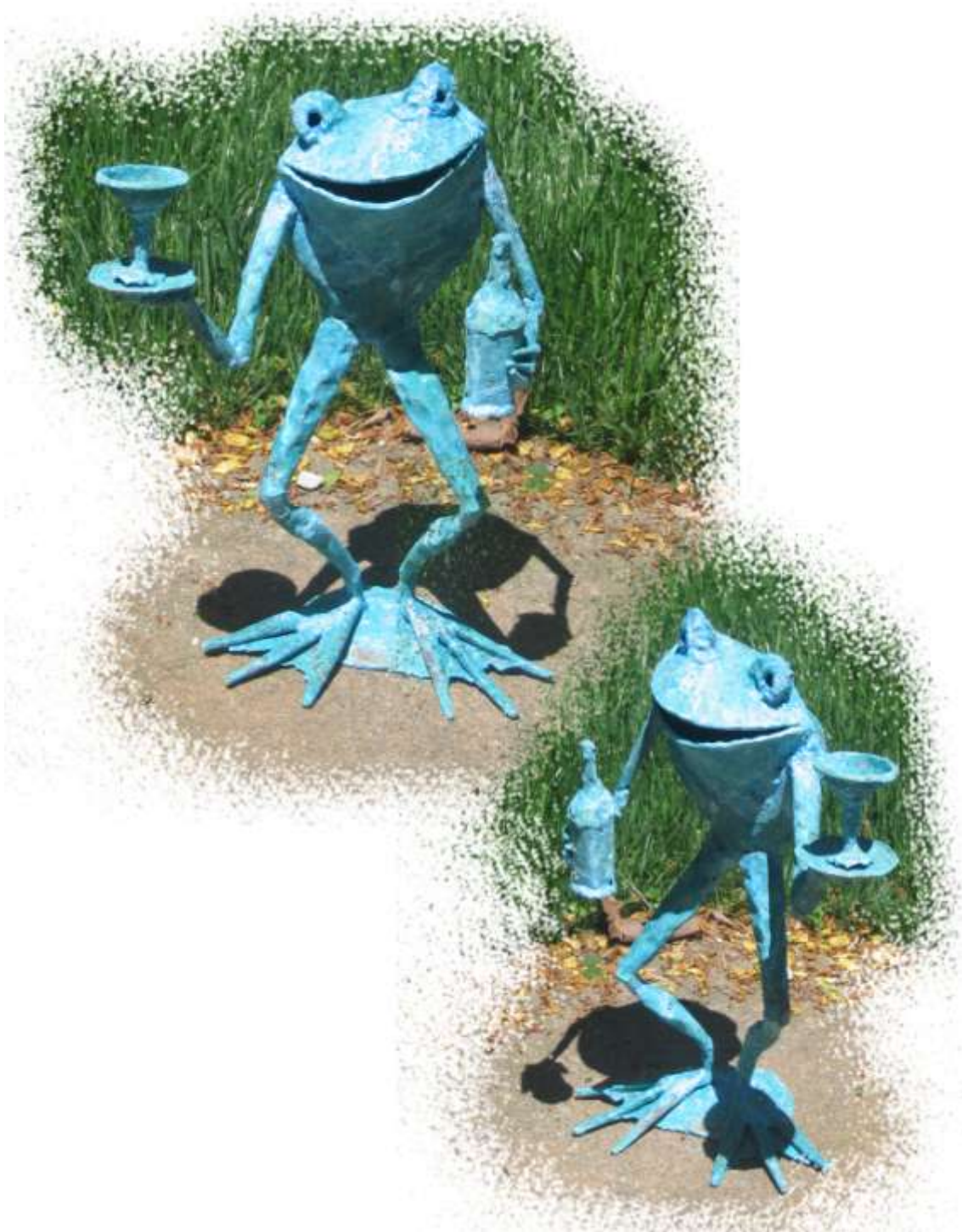




Frog With Top Hat and Cane

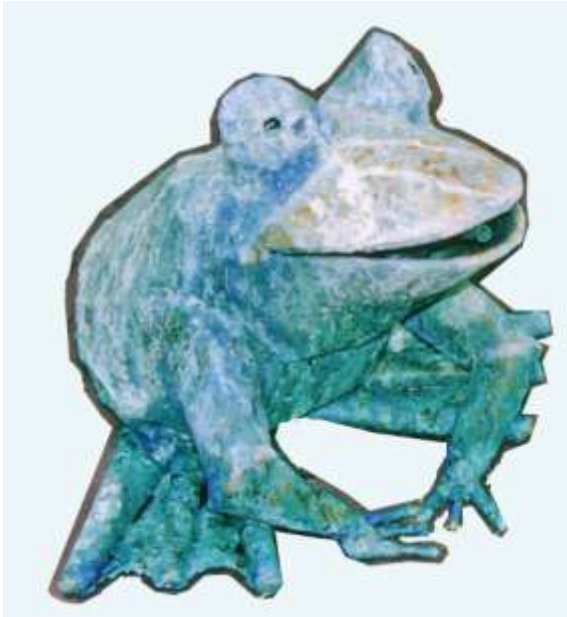


Waiter Frog



Squat Frogs





Small Frogs

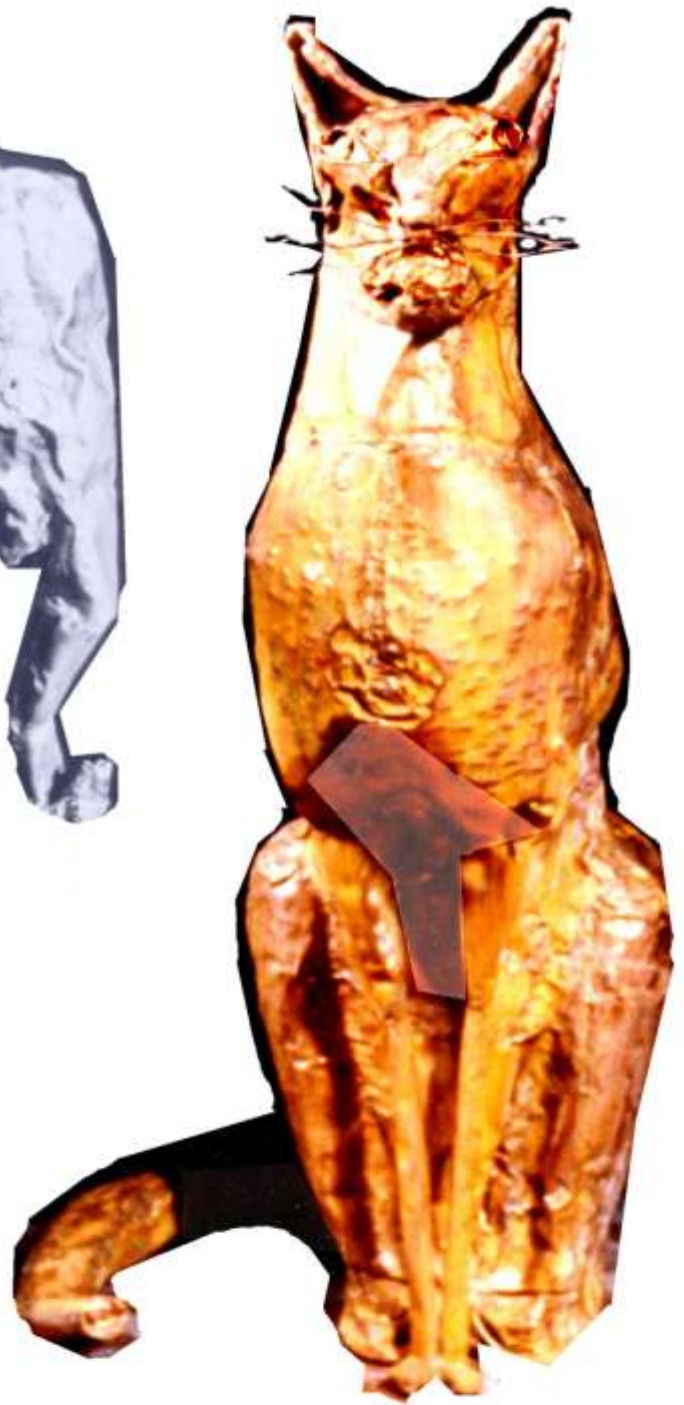
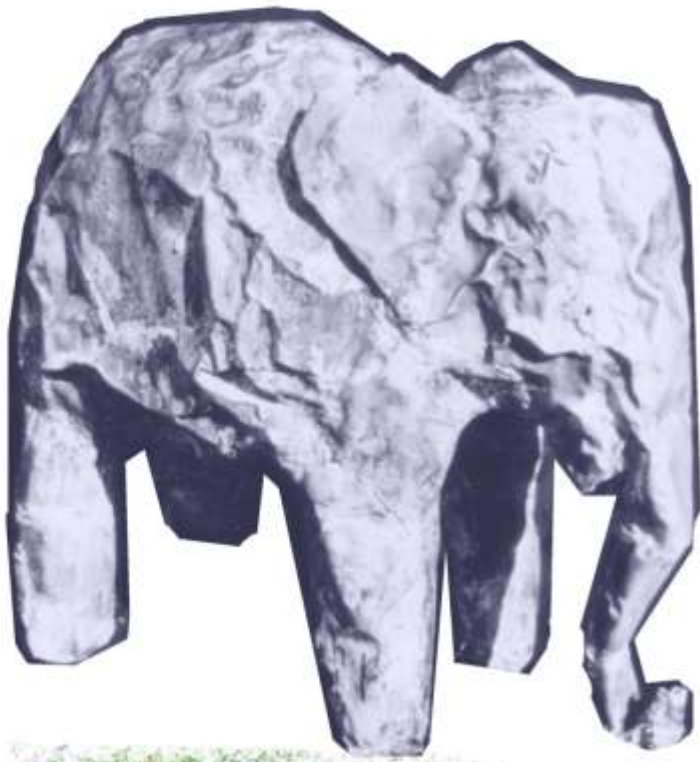


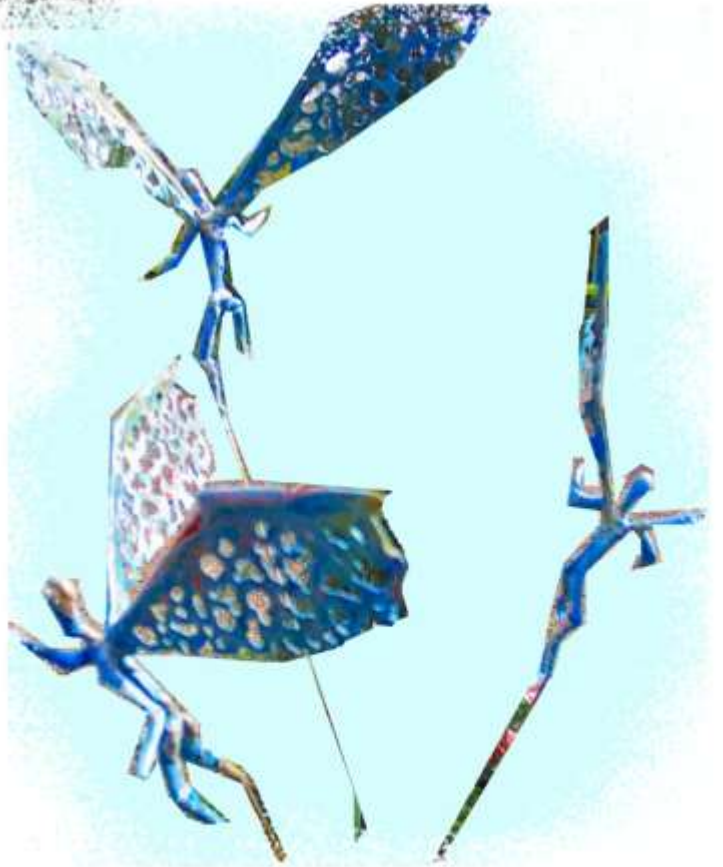




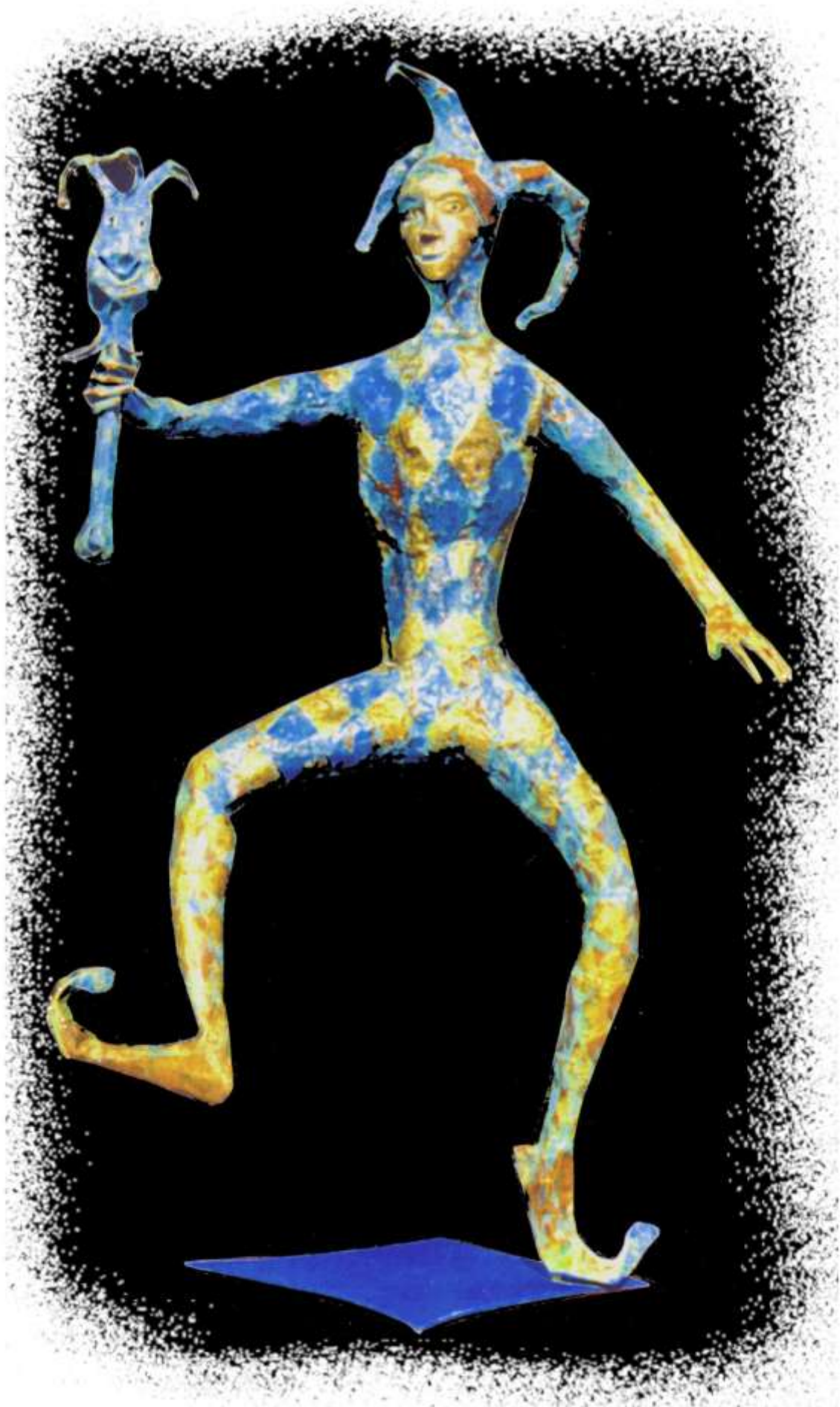
Other Sculptures















All About The Frog Sculptures

I've been making large human-sized frog sculptures for twenty-five years or so now: half my life given over to creating beautiful, whimsical, large, copper frog sculptures. I'm a professional sculpture, and the frog sculptures are my bread and butter, what I do to make money.

Yes, I can make other creatures besides frogs. I've done so in the past and I expect to do more of that in the future. But, mainly, for the past twenty-five years, I've been making frogs.

Now, you may say, all I make is frogs. Why don't I make something else? But just as there's a great variety of real frogs, so with my frogs, I make all different kinds of frogs. My frogs are like people, and though we're all human, just as frogs are all frogs, we are also all so very different.

Now how did I start making frogs? Why frogs? And all that. Well, first I must say that I didn't come up with the original design. My father did. My dad is also a metal sculptor, and I learned the craft from him. I also went to art school, but there I studied other things. I majored in illustration and film animation. Which actually seems to be in its way very appropriate for what I am doing with the frogs because my sculptures have an animated quality and are very much in the realm of picture books and enchantment.

So how did my dad then come up with the human-sized copper frog? Was he a frog lover? Not exactly. In the early 80s, one of my father's patrons suggested he make a frog. He did, and he sold it to that collector. Almost immediately after he made the first frog, he began to make more, and sell them. He found the frog design to be successful in many ways. Frogs are easy to make, they are very recognizable, they have many appreciators out there, and they go well in the garden as well as other spaces. That's just a few reasons for the success of the frog sculptures.

Thus, I started making frogs because I needed a way to support myself as an artist, and here my dad had established that the frog was a successful design. Every frog easily sold when he put it out in the marketplace, a marketplace which consisted for many years of simply displaying it somewhere, in a shop or gallery. There was something wonderful about these big creatures, and just about anyone that admired them wanted to buy, despite the fact that the frog was original art and was more expensive than, well, something not as nice.

So there it is, I'm not the originator of the human-sized copper frog. Like I said, I needed to learn to have less ego in my art, and this is a perfect example of how I was demanded to do that. My father, Charles Smith, came up with the frog. I, Beau Smith, and my brother, Alexander Smith, took up the craft some years later. Sometimes I worked with my father, and I learned a lot in doing so.

My brother was much more the one who worked directly with my father, and I was much more the independent artist. Early on in this venture, we would work together, all three of us. For many years we would have a group show in the spring at the Atlanta Botanical Gar-

dens. We called ourselves "Frog Smiths", seeing as our last name was Smith, and we were Smiths of a sort because we worked with metal and in our way forged our froggies with the help of a few basic tools: an acetylene torch, a hammer, some tin snips, some clamps and some pliers. Those in the know would refer to our work collectively as *The Smith Frogs*.

* * * *

The *Smith Frog* has many copycats. I'm not surprised. The design is ingenious. It commands attention and, for someone who works with metal, it might seem deceptively easy to make. Many years ago I thought I had mastered frog making. I don't feel that way now. And I am about as good as anyone can be at my craft. So it's not at all easy to make a really great frog. Unless you are Beau Smith.

I could say more about the copycats. I won't go into it. It's not a subject I relish. I will say that I have yet to be impressed with the work of those who I know for a fact have copied my sculpture or that of my father or brother. This is not to say I haven't seen some really great frogs out there besides mine, my father's or my brothers. The really great ones are nothing like what we make. They have their own look and are not the result of someone having copied my techniques and produced something inferior.

The best way to for me to make more frogs is for me to train an apprentice. Which I have done. This was the way I learned how to do what I do. I blended my talent and skill with the craft and became quite good. I believe there are other potential frogmakers out there. The best way for someone to become a frogmaker is to be my apprentice. At present I have one apprentice. This is not my son, al-

though he is an artist (age 14 at the time I write this), and soon I will teach him the craft. Does he want to make frogs? I would say he's like me. He doesn't just want to make frogs, but he's willing to learn the craft. He understands the importance of frogmaking. It's a family business, but it is also a way to create some very wonderful art that touches people and helps heal the world.

To become a great frogmaker, one must study with a master. (Me.) One must also appreciate the work of the master frogmaker and pour heart and soul into the work. My frog sculptures have to be a product of love and heart as well as skill, craftsmanship, and artistry. Unlike other art mediums, my frog sculptures cannot be easily reproduced. For someone to make a bronze copy, for example, of one of my frog sculptures would be ridiculous because part of the charm of my work is that it is made by hand. I found myself in a difficult place of wanting to create more frogs and get my work out into the world, but not wanting to sacrifice quality. So I just kept making frogs and growing in skill and technique, and getting more and more frustrated that I could only create so many frogs by myself.

I worked with many people before I found someone who I felt would be a good apprentice and who indeed turned out to be perfect. In the future, I plan to have more apprentices. They free me up to increase my efficiency and creativity. I also develop my skills as a teacher and a mentor. This is part of the frog legacy, opening the heart, giving, and sharing.

THE PROCESS OF MAKING A FROG

Let's talk about some of the techniques involved in building a large, human-sized copper frog. I don't want to give away all my secrets. (Remember those copycats.) But I do want to talk about the process and give you an idea of what goes into a frog. Besides that, even if I were to give demonstrations and show someone exactly how I make a frog, from start to finish, that would not ensure anyone success, and certainly it would not put them on par with me. I've been making frogs for 25 years. This is what I do, day in and day out. How can a novice or even a skilled sculptor compete with that? I've been sculpting in direct metal since I was a teenager. The large, human-size frog sculpture design was given to me to carry it on.

Let's talk first about what a frog is made of. The main ingredient is copper. Why copper? Let's talk about that. Copper is THE metal for craftsmen and sculptors. It's a soft metal, yet when beaten it becomes hard enough to fulfill many requirements of sculpture and other crafted objects. Furthermore, to make the metal soft again, one simply heats it back up. The process is called *annealing*. Not just any heat will soften copper. For copper to soften considerably, it must become red hot. For maximum pliability, it is best to quench the copper immediately afterward, that is, dip it in water to cool it off.

Copper was the first metal the ancients worked with. Man made copper objects, such as vessels and arrowheads, date back to as early as 4000 BC. Copper was the metal closest to the ground. It also had a relatively low melting point. And, as I have said, it can be softened

by heat and then hardened by working it. Copper is an ideal metal to work with. It is very close to bronze, which is the next metal that the ancients worked with. Bronze results from fusing tin with copper. One might say copper is more primitive than bronze.

The earliest vessels were made of copper. A flat piece of copper was hammered against a hollowed out piece of wood. This is how you make a copper bowl. This is apparently how copper bowls were made in ancient times. And this happens to also be how I make a frog head. I hammer copper against a hollowed out space on a piece of wood, generally a log. I have a special way of doing it, a way which is *difficult for others to learn, I've found*. It seems a simple enough procedure. I hammer a sheet of copper against a hollow form. So often with art it is not the tools, but the artist, and what he or she knows, that makes all the difference.

I work with sheet copper. It is annealed, which means it is soft and pliable when I start with it. As I work the metal, it hardens, with the bending, hammering, and shaping. I am always aware of how the metal is pliable and then hardens as I work with it. This basic quality of copper has much to do with how I work with it. I will, for example, prepare my form in such a way that the last bit of shaping gives the metal maximum hardness. I will bend and beat something into place. *To the uninitiated, it may look like I'm beating up on a frog. But I assure you, rather I'm forming and strengthening the copper all the while as I go.*

Typically when we think of a Blacksmith, we think of iron and steel. *Swords into ploughshares...* Equipment for the military and for the farm. And a lot of those objects can be quite beautiful. But the

craftsman, the artist who wanted to make something beautiful, perhaps even more beautiful than functional, is much more apt to turn to copper than steel, iron, or any other metal. You can shape copper much more easily, with a hammer and maybe with your hands. You can much more easily hammer and chisel textures into copper. As we all know, once upon a time copper was not as expensive as it is today. Indeed, now it approaches the value it must have had during its antiquity. Well, okay, I don't know about that, but I do know that when I first started making frogs 25 years ago, copper was much less expensive. Sculptors and craftspeople alike happily worked in copper, appreciating the metal without having to pay an arm and a leg for it. I daresay, the high cost of copper nowadays has put many craftspeople out of business. I am still in the business of making art out of copper because it is art. That is not to say that much craft is not art as well. If the craftsmanship is high quality, surely it can be art. But I'm sure you know that not everything made out of copper is art. You'll find less and less of that now because copper is so much more expensive. Instead, you'll find "yard art" or some other doodad or knickknack of mass produced item made out of another material. Copper is just too expensive not to charge a little bit more for it. My sculptures are very affordable for what they are. But they do not fit the price range of something you might find, at, say, Pier One or Wal-Mart.

As I've talked about the virtues of copper here's something else I like: Since copper is a soft metal, it is much more user friendly when it comes to monumental sculpture. By that I mean that if a child, or anyone else for that matter, stumbles into the sculpture, it is much less likely to hurt him than something made of steel or even bronze. Copper is a soft metal. Even when it is hardened, it is softer than

most other metals.

Now, you will find that many objects made of copper are easily damaged. If thin areas of the copper are not in some way reinforced, and if the copper is not hardened, it can easily bend and possibly break. *That doesn't happen with my sculptures.* I am well aware of the needs of my monumental sculptures, and even on smaller sculptures, I make sure that the work is sturdy and durable. Even so, copper is a soft metal. Its edges are softer than those of other metals. It is more resilient and flexible. It is a friendly metal.

Now for the other materials in the sculpture. The second most important material is brass. This is the material that I use to fuse the copper together. Sometimes I coat areas of copper with brass. Sometimes I hammer pieces of brass and incorporate it into the form. The technique of using brass to weld copper together with itself and other metals is called *brazing*. This is achieved with an oxyacetylene torch, which produces the hottest fire known to man. I heard that many years ago, but I still think its true today.

Brass is similar to copper and bronze. Though not as soft as copper, brass is a soft metal. The blue-green patina that I apply to my copper sculptures affects brass the same way it affects copper, so my sculptures get a nice, overall finish that leaves everything the same color, which is blue-green. This finish is actually a corrosion of the copper (and brass). *Unlike rust on steel, it's a superficial corrosion, which means that the copper is permanent, at least for a thousand years or so.* Whereas, steel will rust all the way through. On some metals, like copper and aluminum, the patina, which is surface corrosion, protects the rest of the metal. I am often asked, *Is the patina permanent?*

It is, but a patina can be scratched off in some other way affected by its environment. That said, the blue-green patina on my sculpture will remain, although it can gradually change in accordance to the chemicals in the atmosphere and rain. The way to stop this from happening is to seal the metal using a clear epoxy paint or similar coating. I do this sometimes, but I much more often allow the metal the freedom to change over time. It's more organic to me. I think of it this way: I like to let the copper breathe. Like a fine wine, I suppose.

I also use stainless steel on my sculptures. I use this sturdy, non-corrosive metal to reinforce my sculptures, and sometimes I use it on some surfaces. This silver colored metal I usually give a flat, softly sanded finish. This is a typical finish given to stainless steel, which is a beautiful metal which does not develop much of a patina at all. It's *stainless steel*. It doesn't corrode – rust.

On occasion, I polish some areas of the sculpture. But more often I allow the sculpture to have finishes that do not require any upkeep, and look great, by the way.

All the metals I use are non-corrosive metals, meaning, they will stand the test of time. These metals can be out in the weather, and they will last. They are as permanent as permanent can be. So the patina on the copper and brass, though it technically is corrosion, is not corrosion that will affect the rest of the sculpture. It is surface corrosion. Thus, copper and brass are non-corrosive metals, just like *stainless steel*. So, what I'm saying is that I use metals that are permanent.

Outdoor sculptures have a varying degree of permanency, depending on what they are made of. My sculptures are as permanent as permanent can be. As well, because I take care to produce the sculpture in such a way that it will be durable and sturdy, and because wherever I need to, I reinforce it, my sculptures can be exposed to the elements indefinitely, and they can be handled and manhandled and remain intact. You can sit in the lap of one of my frog sculptures and it would not affect the sculpture in any way. The sculpture is sturdy, like a bronze.

So these are the materials in my sculpture, and what you can expect from them. They are permanent and durable, and they are beautiful. Let's face it, steel is not particularly beautiful. Rustic, yes – emphasis on *rust*. Aluminum is not particularly pretty, either. Or tin, or pewter... Well, you can see I have reverence for the metals I use in my sculpture.

Now then, how do I work with these metals? I've talked about the frog's head, which I fashion much like the ancients fashioned their copper bowls. What about the rest of the frog? It is an amalgam of techniques. Others can appreciate, but perhaps not as I can, since I work with copper most every day, how my frog sculptures are a product of skill in craftsmanship and design. The frog indeed demonstrates what can be done with the medium of brazed copper. It is, in its way, a tour de force of craftsmanship of the metal. I am particularly happy with how a variety of techniques are brought together to produce a frog. The creation of a frog sculpture is a result of cutting, shaping, and brazing copper. I add stainless steel and brass wherever needed. But the main forms are copper and brass that is fused to the copper. I cut sheets of copper. I create forms. I braze

pieces of copper together. And if you'll notice, parts of the frog are made in different ways. I will briefly describe my process to give you a glimpse into what goes into a frog.

I begin with a concept. Sometimes I work from a photograph of someone actually posing the way the frog is to be posing. I also sometimes make thumbnail sketches to make it clear just how I will proceed. This does help me work toward an end result, which will not look exactly like the sketch, I assure you, but will have a similar quality. And certain aspects of the sketch are often something a client has asked for, such as a frog having the left foot crossed over the knee, and so forth. I don't encourage such requirements. But sometimes one wants what one wants, and it is usually easy enough to fulfill such requirements. I've been making frogs for over 25 years. I've made a lot of different frogs in a lot of different poses.

I begin with the body of the frog. I place it how it is to be, and then I start adding parts. A lot of times I make the head and place that, but not always. I never make the same frog. That means that I try different things and even though I have a standard way of putting together a Frog sculpture, I often deviate from the way I do that. I change things up. I take risks and try different things. Consequently, as I say, every frog is different. This is, in fact, a hallmark of my work. Every piece is original.

I lovingly sculpt each part of the frog. This part goes here. That goes there... Until I'm done. One of the last touches: The eye pupils. The way the eye is designed, there is a hole where the pupil is. That's achieved by burning a hole in the shape that is the eye. It's dark inside the forms that are each eye, so it turns out that the frog has perfectly dark pupils. This one touch adds so much life to the sculpture.

It is, in a way, how the frog opens his eyes. My father has made frogs without putting a hole where the pupil would go. In other words, making a frog that doesn't have a pupil. They look quite different. They look rather like their eyes are closed, even though they are open. It's unsettling. I prefer to make happy frogs.

Well, I suppose I could talk about frog-making ad infinitum. But I will spare you. Suffice it to say that each and every step is a labor of love. Currently, I have one assistant, and he's great. I went through many people to find him. He puts his heart into the metal, and that's just what I am looking for. Also, he understands very well what my requirements are for any piece of work. Not just anyone can do this work.

Once the frog is complete, and before the patina, I usually take high resolution pictures, and sometimes video, of the piece. I post the pictures to my blog. If I have video, I put that on YouTube. I send my client an email with links to pictures and video. I want to get an A-Okay before I patina, because once I do the patina, it is difficult to make any changes to the sculpture. Then I patina. This usually takes two days. I take more pictures and show the client the finished frog, and I ship off the sculpture. This is the way I tend to work, although I am also making frogs that simply go out of my shop and hop on along to galleries. What I mean to show here is that a frog has to meet my exacting standards, and often the needs of a client.

Here is a question I am often asked: *How to secure the Frog?* This is part of the building of the creature. It is made in such a way that securing it is easy and effortless. There are places the frog can be bolted in or on wherever he is standing or seated. And this can be perma-

So that's how I make a frog. I cut and form shapes of copper. I beat the copper and braze parts together. I further hammer and shape... My tools are few. I don't need a lot of tools. It is know-how that is most important in my work. I understand how to work with the metal. If I need a certain tool to form and shape the metal a certain way, I make that tool.

