

# IN DELICATE BALANCE

## GEORGE SHERWOOD

Currier Museum of Art  
150 Ash Street  
Manchester, New Hampshire

Through September 6



**"PERCEPTION IS REALITY" IS A FAVORITE APHORISM OF MINE. AND IT'S TRUE. EXCEPT WHEN IT'S NOT.**

In advance of the installation of a kinetic sculpture exhibit by Massachusetts engineer-turned-artist George Sherwood, I received the media materials. The pieces titled "Steel Life I and II" appeared to be two heads — like you'd see on a boutique mannequin or a poster for Blue Man Group. They seemed solid, about a foot tall and covered with reflective, mirror-like material. Au contraire!

In reality, each head is eight feet tall, six feet wide and only six inches deep. A serious misperception on my part. I'd swear they were the size and mass of a human head. And they are not solid like a mannequin head; they are actually constructed of small pieces of thin, stainless steel sheets that hang from hooks. Caught by a shift in air current the pieces shimmer, showcasing the marriage of construction and art. They appear to be what they aren't.

Long gone is the limited notion that sculpture must be a piece of carved marble à la Bartolini, or the cast bronze of Rodin. Artists of the new millennium often embrace changes in modern life, experimenting with construction methods and materials, such as stainless steel, and introducing moving parts to engage space and time. These kinetic sculptors manipulate principles of balance that determine the movement and visual effects of their work.

Sherwood's sculptures echo with vitality and play off of gestures extracted from nature. The swaying of grass in a windy meadow, a flock of birds diving and swooping over a marsh, and the craning of a bird's neck are patterns of movement he employs to give life to what could be static forms. To fully understand the magic effect they have, you must experience them in person.

In addition to the "Steel Life" heads, which are the most mesmerizing pieces in the show — at a distance of 20 feet they practically wink and interact with you — 13 other kinetic sculptures and 10 study maquettes are on display.

Two of Sherwood's sculptures share the courtyard with famed kinetic sculptor Mark di Severo's monumental piece "Origins." Sherwood's "Flock of Birds" is a series of furred stainless steel "birds" that react to the gentlest breeze and

ABOVE: *Wind Orchid*, 2007.  
BELOW: *Steel Life I* and *Steel Life II*, 2009, stainless steel.





appear to fly off in unison. One is reminded of starlings in spring that populate the lawn in droves, and at the least provocation fly as if in a choreographed dance. Across the courtyard from "Flocks" is "Fusion II." Changes in form and surface of this work, which is curvilinear with soft edges, are determined by atmospheric conditions like light and moisture, and mark the passage of time, the fleeting nature of any given instant. The interplay of changing shapes is hypnotic.

More of Sherwood's works are on view inside the Putnam Gallery. "Wind Orchid," another gently turning sculpture (thanks to a strategically placed fan) encourages us to examine the individual elements of the piece and how objects in motion create shifting designs and forms in space.

Sherwood's distinct combination of manufactured materials and organic forms invites us to think about the complex relationship between nature and modernity common to our contemporary world. The "Tendril" series (works that depict stylized leaves and vines) are made from the same three basic elements — a yoke, arms and sails — but the relationship between the parts differ, and therein lays the essence of why they move differently through space. One work has a symmetrical yoke, while another's "stem" is longer and creates an asymmetrical composition. These variations determine a unique shape and rhythm of movement specific to each sculpture.

This exhibit may do more than surprise and visually dazzle you; it may move you toward the wisdom that perception is not always reality.

Linda Chestney



*Fusion, stainless steel.*

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