

# ARTISTIC ALCHEMIST

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TRANSFORMS  
SCRAPS  
OF STEEL  
INTO  
WALL ART



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Opposite page: *Fade to Gold*, 66" x 48", found steel assemblage

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**A**s a young boy growing up in New Jersey in the early 1970s, Mark Cesark liked to stare at a reproduction of Pablo Picasso's *Three Musicians* that hung on the wall of his family's home. While his two brothers pursued each other in games of chase, Cesark was busy trying to decipher the cubist images of artists such as Picasso and Paul Klee that his parents admired.

Years later, after an uninspiring stint studying construction engineering at a junior college, Cesark surrendered to his own creative inclinations and earned a BFA from New York's Alfred University, followed by a masters in fine art from the

Massachusetts College of Art in Boston.

Throughout his academic career, Cesark's preferred medium was sculpture. Today, he still utilizes the torches and grinders found in the metal sculptor's tool chest, but he does not consider himself a sculptor. Nor is

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—MARK CESARK

he a painter, though he describes his process as "painterly." Rather, Cesark hauls hefty scraps of found steel back to his Missouri Heights studio and assembles them into essentially two-dimensional forms designed to hang on a wall. His "paintbox" most often consists of several dumps and junkyards from Aspen to Grand Junction; his palette is the time-worn debris of an industrial society.

"I guess you could say I am what I find," says Cesark, whose ruddy complexion and muscular build suggest the physical rigors involved in gathering his raw materials. Truck-beds, fenders, corrugated siding and steel barrels that may one day find their

way into his work sit in tidy arrangements outside his studio. Part of the roof of a 1950s pickup truck features prominently in one piece hanging on a wall inside. Over its functional lifespan the truck had been painted white, then yellow, then blue. Now only the thickest layers of paint remain. Time and the punishing Colorado sun have absorbed all but a few drips and brush strokes. "I'm attracted to the natural wear time and man has on surfaces," he says. "If I had tried to paint it, it would never have that quality—that intrinsic nature of history."

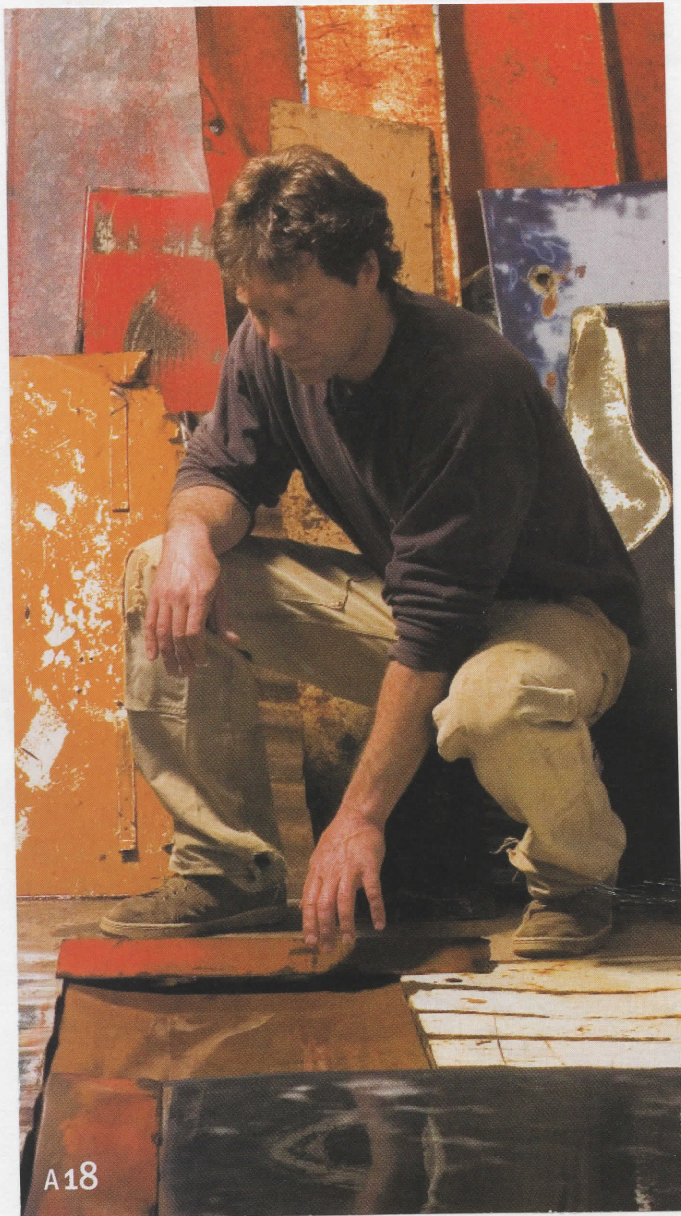
In another room of the studio, panels of disparate metals are splayed on the floor like a giant jigsaw puzzle waiting to be fitted together. Cesark grabs a brush and washes a rusted corner with boiled linseed oil to demonstrate how the colors will spring to life in the final phase of transformation from scrap to art. Other than applying a coat of oil over the finished piece, he refuses to alter the surfaces in any way. "I'm quite strict with the found object process," he says, referring to the movement pioneered by avant-garde artist Marcel Duchamp and later John Chamberlain. "I look for certain qualities of texture and color, and for interesting wear patterns. But I'm a purist, it must be found."

In 1995, Cesark and his wife, the ceramist K. Cesark, whom he met in graduate school, moved to

the Roaring Fork Valley. Cesark's longstanding love for the mountains cultivated over nearly two decades of annual family sojourns to Rocky Mountain National Park prompted the young artists to pursue their careers out West.

A picture-hanging business helped pay the rent during their early years in the valley. Then Cesark received an unexpected career boost when the late John Powers spotted some of his work on display in the Adelson Gallery on the campus of the Aspen Institute. John and Kimiko Powers' extensive collection of contemporary and pop art is considered to be among the most important private collections in the world. Powers (who died in 1999) immediately





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LARRY GOLD SMITH



HAL WILLIAMS

Mark Cesark, *Untitled*, 58" x 44", found steel assemblage

purchased several Cesark pieces for his Carbon-dale home.

The artist underplays the significance of such laudatory attention. "It was even before I was represented by a gallery," he says. "To have someone with that great an eye for art take an interest in my work... I was so touched."

Ingrid Magidson, who with her husband Jay owns Magidson Fine Art in Aspen, puts it in a broader light: "John Powers was a major collector," she says. "And when John Powers would speak everyone would listen. He took Mark under his wing right away." Since then, Cesark has seen his work included in an increasing number of significant public and private collections, and Magidson says it is currently under consideration for a Denver museum show.

As for the future of Cesark's work, Magidson is unabashed in her predictions. "Jay and I like taking on artists on the cutting edge," she says. "We're constantly looking for artists who are doing something new and exciting, but in an exceptional way. No one else is doing what Mark's doing. We feel strongly that his work will change the art world."

For his part, the change that Cesark seems most concerned with is the alchemical one that results from the artist's vision and the found object. "I like taking something that is basically worthless, that has been thrown out," Cesark says, "and transforming it into something... different." ■