

Andrew Dohner

Sculptor / Blacksmith
Port Clinton, PA

Where is your studio?

My studio is at home. It occupies half of a pole building on our farm in the beautiful Blue Mountains of Pennsylvania.

Do you work alone in your studio and do you prefer that to sharing studio space with other artists?

This is the first time in my career that I have had studio space where I primarily work alone. For six years I worked as a journeyman blacksmith, traveling around the country working for and learning from other blacksmiths. Following my training, I rented space in other people's shops until I could afford to set up a shop of my own. Blacksmithing, especially large scale architectural work often requires more than one set of hands. Now that I run a one-man operation, my approach has shifted.

Do you keep regular hours of work time?

Yes, and lots of overtime.

Do you listen to music or prefer silence when you are most creative?

Metalworking shops are loud in nature. Listening to music in the shop helps to drown out the noise of the equipment and allows me to focus and think more clearly.

How would a visitor describe your studio? (for example: chaotic, obsessively tidy, comfortable or intimidating, etc.)

Tidy and well organized. Dirty and loud.

Do you seek out conversations with other artists either formally (like a clay club, or XX Association, etc.) or informally (like looking for feedback from your artist friends or mates)?

Informally I feel fortunate that I have a group of mentors who feel comfortable talking with me about all aspects of being a maker from the technical and business sides to the creative and emotional. On the formal end I pursue opportunities to teach and lecture and enjoy the interaction with artists of all skill levels.

Do you keep current with work in your field or prefer to work without the potential influences?

In the past I have lived in artist communities where I was very involved and influenced by what other artists were producing. Now I live and work in a rural area and for the first time in my career, it is just me, the studio, and the work.

What creative books or other sources do you find useful?

Sheet Metal Patterns and Layouts (1953), Metal Design International Series, Otto

Schmirler- The Smithy's Craft and Tools, Edgar Brandt – Master of Art Deco Ironwork, Blacksmithing Manual Illustrated – J. L. Lillico. I am also inspired by industrial design from the 1930's – 1950's especially bridge, boat, and airplane construction.

What distracts you most from your work?

Having other aspects of my life besides my work. For example, my wife and our 180-acre farm.

How do you nurture yourself to remain creative?

Communicating with my mentors and colleagues and even other makers that I compete with. Pushing myself to participate in shows and commissions to keep my work current.

Do you make “office” time and is that a struggle to balance the artist with the business-person?

No. Yes.

How many years did it take for you to feel accomplished at your craft? And how many years have you been working in your materials or as an artist?

I have been working with metal for 20 years and I am 36 years old. I studied the trade for 12 years before I considered using the material as a creative outlet. Only in the past five years have I felt that my work is at a professional level.

Can you define “studio practice” as it relates to your life or share a personal philosophy about what contributed to your choice to be an artist, and how you approach that choice as a lifestyle?

My studio practice is driven by the process of making. The tooling and techniques used to make an object are equally important to me as the finished product. I draw inspiration from industrial manufacturing where the process used to make an object is not hidden. Part of the reason that I chose to become an artist was because there are no external limits to what can be created in the studio space. It provides me with an environment that I am in total control of and where I can explore and refine new ideas.

Bio

Andrew Dohner is a third generation steel worker from Central Pennsylvania, home of the Bethlehem Steel. He has 10 years of experience as an industrial welder and fabricator and also an extensive background as a journeyman blacksmith.

The opportunity to work in a number of shops across the country has given him a strong and diverse education with a unique approach to forging steel. He currently operates his shop out of Port Clinton PA where he produces functional and sculptural objects with conventional and unconventional techniques.

Andrew has demonstrated at several blacksmithing events and taught classes at various craft schools. His current work has been exhibited at the Madison Morgan Cultural Center Madison GA, National Ornamental Metals Museum Memphis TN, and the Penland Gallery, Penland NC.

