

# Texas sculptor creates art from scrap



## George Tobolowsky

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Texas sculptor George Tobolowsky works with found objects; he likes the shape and texture of pieces and determining how the object was used. He also knows when to stop, when one more item on his sculpture will be too much.

“The key to found object art is to make sure every time you add a piece or you fabricate a little piece to it, that it works, that it is the right size and the right texture and the right color,” Tobolowsky told the Reporter-Telegram in a telephone interview before the opening of his work at the Ellen Noel Art Museum in Odessa. “And the other key to found object art is to know when to stop.”

Naming his sculptures is also important to Tobolowsky, who comes to art from a business background. He studied accounting and sculpture at Southern Methodist University, graduated from SMU Law School and started his business career as an accountant at Arthur Young in Dallas. He later worked in the legal and tax departments at the Zale Corporation, which was started by his wife’s family.

Tobolowsky owned and operated various franchise businesses with partners, including tanning salons and Dunkin’ Donuts shops. At one time, he ran 75 Blockbuster stores.

In 1995, he built a sculpture studio on his ranch in Mountain Springs, an hour north of Dallas. In 2006, at the age of 56, he had his first solo show at the Gerald Peters Gallery. Currently his work is being exhibited at the Ellen Noel Art Museum, the Old Jail Art Center of Albany, The Grace Museum of Abilene and the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts as part of this summer’s West Texas Triangle.

“His work has been compared to (James) Surls (under whom he studied at SMU) but also with David Smith’s and Louise Nevelson,” said Les Reker, director of the Ellen Noel. “His work is really unique in that he’s taking scrap metal or refuge from contemporary society and welding them together into these wonderful, aesthetically beautiful pieces of sculpture. So it’s kind of repurposing, but putting them together in a new way. He’s not the first artist to do this, but he does it better than any I’ve seen. I think he’s one of the finest sculptors Texas has produced, and I think he’s in his prime.”

Tobolowsky is the great-grandson of Russian émigrés; his father was president of a textile company. Included in the four pieces on the grounds of the Odessa museum is “My Grandfather’s Start-Up,” which weighs around 3,500 pounds.

“‘My Grandfather’s Start-Up’ is on an old push cart,” said Tobolowsky. “I’m a third generation Texan. When my grandparents were in the textile business, they used push carts (to push materials around). If you had a push cart, you had a business. That’s why I called it that. Take kids today. If you have a computer, you’ve got a business. ...

“Art is very personal. It’s all about the experiences you’ve had or someone you know has had.

“Form & Substance: The Art of George Tobolowsky” runs through Sept. 11 and includes four outdoor works and 11 sculptures inside in the Patron’s Gallery. The museum is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and 2 to 5 p.m. Sunday. No admission is charged.

“His work is represented nationally and internationally,” said Reker. “One of the things that is appealing about this work in West Texas -- and I found it to be exciting -- he reuses some pieces from oil fields and drilling. His work is getting a lot of positive attention from some who don’t normally look at art.”