

# Minden native turns activism into art

The Associated Press

HOUSTON — At first glance, the iron sculpture artist Ed Wilson forged from intense heat and scraps of metal appears to be a giant flower growing out of a tree stump.

However, take a closer but careful look and you'll see the flower's petals are actually sharp two-foot circular saw blades that could severely injure anyone who decided to caress them.

Inside his Houston workshop, which resembles more a welder's workplace with its blackened tools and oxy-acetylene torch, Wilson, 46, tries to capture the dichotomies of life in his cast iron sculptures. His works also express a strong sense of activism — sometimes environmental, sometimes political and sometimes social.

Within Wilson's small loft apartment, located in his workshop, hangs an 11 foot by 8 foot iron cross. Inside the cross are four rectangular iron plates with rifles embedded in them.

"I find religion is often about both peace and violence," Wilson said. "I really like playing with those ugly ideas of things we do to people that aren't nice and exposing these ideas through forms that are very beautiful."

Wilson grew up in Minden, and his interest in art developed from an early age. Wilson has lived in Houston since 1981 and got his master of fine arts degree from the University of Houston.

Another example of Wilson's fascination with contradictions and double meanings is a work entitled "X-caliber." According to the King Arthur legend, the once and future king pulled the magical sword Excalibur from a stone it had been embedded in and began his glorious reign. Wilson's tweaking of the legend has an Uzi machine gun embedded in a stone.



AP

Sculptor Ed Wilson smiles after hoisting his elk's head onto its mount at his Houston studio. Until placing the head on the mount, Wilson, formerly of Minden, was uncertain if the base was large enough to hold it.

"Today it seems if you possess a weapon, you possess power," he said. "On the streets, the more powerful automatic weapon you have, the more powerful you are."

Wilson's flower sculpture, which he hasn't titled yet, was also born of the same philosophy. Besides using the saw blades as petals, Wilson has his flower growing out of a tree stump that stands as a symbol of the clear-cutting of the nation's forests, especially in the Northwest. Within the circles of the tree stump, a poem is etched that talks of hauling away a mountain's trees by the truckload and "scrubbing the bare slopes clean."

"The lumber industry is feeding people but it's destroying the land," he said.

He often goes to Idaho in the summer, which sparked his interest in issues related to clear-cutting of trees.

And then there's the long and lonely hours he spends in his workshop, which Wilson said has paid off in putting his message and his art before the public.

"It's very satisfying to see someone react to what you do and see them get it," he said. "A lot of thought, emotion and energy goes into these things. In a way, it's an extension of me."

Even how Wilson crafts his sculptures is somewhat of a dichotomy.

He often builds molds for his sculptures and takes them to a local industrial foundry, where they are born from melted down engine blocks and scraps of iron from cars.

"Art is sort of an oddity out there," Wilson said Keen Foundry Inc., where he estimates he has filled up between 300 and 400 molds in the last three years. "But we've learned from each other."