

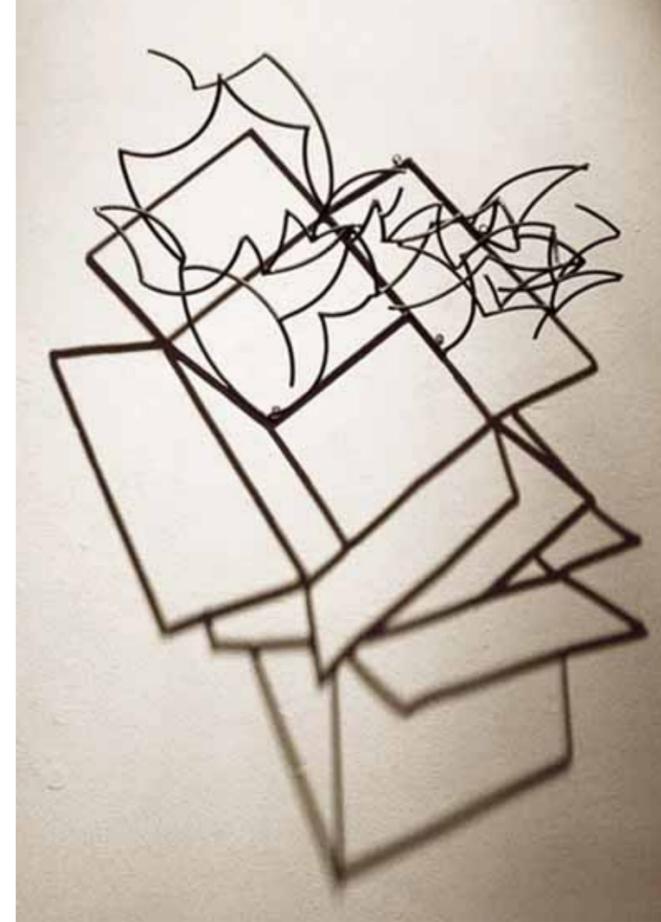
# The shadow man

Larry Kagan and his approach to shadow design.

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*When the lights are off all you see is a tangled mass of thick steel wire – straight pieces and bent pieces welded roughly together and fixed to the wall. The observer has no way of knowing what this work of art is supposed to represent – until the light goes on and the profusion of intertwined wires casts a clearly defined shadow on the wall. The mysterious, frightening side to shadow gives way to a perceptible image. Shadow changes its meaning.*

Larry Kagan, "Luckies", Triennale 2004



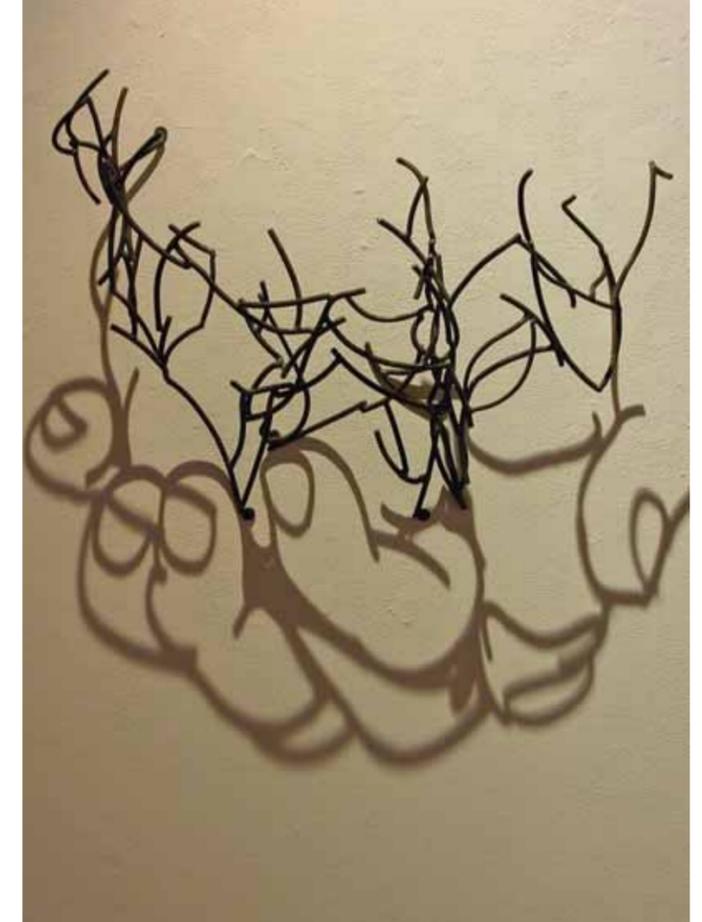
Nesting Boxes

Larry Kagan first studied Engineering, and after acquiring a Master of Arts at the State University of New York at Albany in 1970, turned his attention to painting, because free design interested him more than building aeroplanes and rockets. However, he soon discovered that the third dimension was even more important for him than colour and he began to produce sculptures. When he photographed the sculptures he made, the shadows appeared as an uncontrollable problem. Motivated by this, Larry Kagan began to experiment with light and shadow to gain control over the shadow. This was a good 30 years ago. The problem became a medium to work with, and he started creating sculptures that generated specific shadows. This led him to discover that there was enormous scope for design in the volume of these sculptures. His engineering background supported his approach, which was based on mathematical calculations and technical

solutions to produce the structures he required.

The crown to all Larry Kagan's ideas on creating sculptures that would produce shadows was his observation of wrought iron gates and the highly differentiated shadows they gave rise to. He refers to his latest works as "The scrambling of forms and information in a new way of capturing and saving them".

What Larry Kagan creates are sculptures that emphasize the volume of shadows. The origin of each art piece is a two-dimensional image, but it is developed in the form of a three-dimensional structure which is not immediately comprehensible to the viewer. Only when projected back onto a flat surface, in this case a wall, do the shadows cast by the chaotic looking sculptures reveal their true content. The only viewing position to be able to decipher the graphic content with or without the light source is the light source. Technically speaking, every part of the shadow on



Hand in Hand

the wall corresponds to a point positioned anywhere on the line between the light source and the shadow. The artist plays with this very arbitrariness to create the three-dimensional steel wire structure. The sculptures develop experimentally, cut to size piece by piece, bent appropriately and welded together, and not calculated on the computer, as you might think. The greatest problem is how to fix the individual elements without unintentionally affecting the shadow. Shadows have to be concealed within the shadows.

The artist has not yet exhausted the theme of shadow creation for his work. He continues to research the subtleties of shadow – its colour, intensity, movement, sharpness and the way shadows are layered. His intention is to play with the onlooker's urge to discover how things come to be, and to make them comprehensible. The latter probably stems from his engineering background. With shadow it is

more the absence of information than the absence of light that is significant. The idea is to make the onlooker aware of this through the transformation of the abstract quality of the sculpture into information.

Even if all the works are fascinating, the most impressive are those where the dual nature of the two dimensions is clearly enhanced through the work itself; when the steel wire sculpture translates into shadow, as with the image of the open shadow box from which a mass of wires is spilling out, or the hand that appears to be holding the sculpture. The perception of shadow could hardly be a more deliberate process.

Gallery: OK Harris, 383 West Broadway, New York, NY 10012