

the **ANVIL'S**
Ring



VOLUME 41

NUMBER 3

SUMMER 2013

Moving Metal

How Casey Parlette Captures the Fluidity of Life

~Betsy Sanz

www.caseyparlette.com

For sculptor Casey Parlette, the material is often as much the inspiration as the subject. With marine life as his primary muse, you could easily generalize Casey as a wildlife artist, lumping him in with painters and photographers and other observers-at-a-distance, but it would be an incomplete story. As a free diver, ocean lifeguard, underwater cameraman, amateur biologist and just a guy with a ton of curiosity, through his sculptural work, Casey tries to tell the story of the natural world as he sees it unfold every day. To him, it's not only a story of form; it's a story of motion.

Growing up in the hills and along the shores of Southern California, Casey always had a passion for woodcarving. In his childhood and young adult years, he transformed countless pieces of found wood into all manner of creatures. Carving led him to metalworking at an early age, because there were many things he envisioned that he would not be able to accomplish working in wood alone. Metalwork opened up new opportunities. Like wood, he found that metal had its strengths and its weaknesses.

Today, Casey often draws on the advantages of both metal and wood to render the pieces he envisions. His sculptures are hammered, forged, carved, heat tempered and welded of bronze, brass, steel, titanium, exotic and domestic woods, mother of pearl, abalone, stone, concrete and more. He chooses natural materials that have inherent patterning, texture and color that reflect those of his subjects.

It is often the natural state of the material that defines the sculpture. Such was the case when last year Casey found a large section of curly redwood that had a remarkable striped patterning, not unlike the markings seen on the skin of a tiger shark. Casey carved the piece of redwood into a life-sized tiger shark body; for head, tail and fins he

hammered, shaped and welded bronze sheet. Wood and metal came together in an incredibly lifelike manner to reflect the beautiful fluidity that a shark demonstrates when swimming.

And it's the fluidity that Casey is going for. He believes that when movement is well expressed, spirit is well expressed. This philosophy is what brought Casey to traditional blacksmithing in the first place.

The scales of the hunting alligator; the articulating exoskeletons of migrating lobsters; the flow of kelp leaves in an ocean current; the long, curling tentacles of a squid; the brilliant, shifting blue of Amazonian butterflies—all (and more) have been shaped and hammered by Casey Parlette to express realistic movement that is at once simple and complex, refined and raw.

"When I start a piece, I know the direction in which I want to take it, but the finer details I figure out as I go," Casey says of the approach he takes to metals in his sculptures. "Traditional blacksmithing techniques allow me the flexibility I need to let the piece evolve, while lending a certain amount of integrity to the storytelling. The bends and hammer marks make inorganic metal become organic, full of life and personality." ☞





Tiger Shark; Carved Curly Redwood, Hammered, Welded Bronze, Steel, Stainless Steel
8'3"

Tiger Shark was a commissioned piece to be installed under a glass landing in a private residence, so it would be suspended by cables and viewed from the top down as well as at eye level. This allowed an opportunity to showcase the beautifully fluid curves that sharks demonstrate when they're swimming. Curly redwood was selected for the body to represent the beautiful tiger-like striping natural to this species.



Casey Parlette

left:

Butterflies; Hammered, Heat-tempered Titanium, Carved Quillo Bordon, Wenge Wood;
30" x 24"

The blue morpho butterfly can be found in most of Central and South America. Their intense coloration makes them highly recognizable. In Joy, each butterfly's titanium wings are hammered to achieve the wing texture, after which they are heat tempered to achieve the vivid blue color. The butterflies are mounted to leaves carved out of quillo bordon wood from the Peruvian Amazon, which naturally has a bright yellow coloration. The blue of the titanium swarm changes hue depending on the light and time of day.

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American Alligator; Forged, Hammered, Welded Steel, Brass, Poured Concrete;
74" x 22"

Each piece of the alligator was hand forged out of steel and welded together to give it the primordial look that alligators have. The eyes are made of polished brass, and the base is concrete with the ripples sculpted in to give the feel of the creature swimming through water. In the wild, when all you see is the head and top of the back of this stealthy predator, you know you're in trouble.

