



studio

LOST AND FOUNDRY

Historic Metal Art Alive in Tacoma

BY JILL SANFORD | PHOTOS BY JEFF HOBSON



In Norse mythology, the chief god Odin had two ravens. One represented thought; the other memory. Conversely, the raven of Native American folklore in the Pacific Northwest is a creator god. Two Ravens Studio in Tacoma is an art foundry where thought, memory and creation come together.

Tucked in a small unassuming garage off of a busy street in downtown Tacoma, artists at Two Ravens are hard at work creating all sorts of things, from custom made frog doorknobs to giant, intricate sculptures, replica hood ornaments for classic cars and more.

Inside the studio that looks sort of like an old auto shop, molten bronze turns

hot orange, like lava. Goopy, thick yellow wax clings to a dancing figure that is ready to be cast. The smell of burning chemicals circulates the warm air produced by the kiln that blazes at 2,020 degrees.

Two Ravens owners Katrina Toft and Ed Kroupa started the business in 2008, at a time when the economy's downward spiral was shutting doors left and right to those trying to make a name for themselves in the art world. They met when they worked at Tacoma Bronze Works, another foundry that ended up shutting its doors.

"When Bronze Works closed down there was nothing around here that utilized the skills that I have," says

Kroupa. "So instead of relocating we just took the chance. We knew there would be a market we just didn't know how strong it would be."

Metal casting may seem like something of a lost art form, but business has been steadily increasing over the past four years, the owners say. They also do resin casting. "Whatever it is, we can pretty much find a way to make it work," Kroupa said. That seems to have become a mantra of sorts for the company that employs five.

The specialized artisans of Two Ravens cast sculptures in wax, create ceramic molds and pour metal. And truly, the process of transforming an artist's design into a skillfully rendered »

bronze, aluminum, or resin sculpture requires at least three people to lift and pour the molten liquid safely. This is not work that can be done by one person.

"Everyone who works here is an artist," Toft said, "but we are also essentially the artist's hands." She explains that it is challenging making another artist's work, yet it can be equally rewarding.

Usually an artist will bring a sculpture made out of a clay, foam or wood. Then the process of production begins — mold making, wax casting, ceramic shell encasing, metal finishing and patina chemical treating. It usually takes about eight weeks to see a project completed.

Two Ravens does art for individual homeowners looking for just the right piece to accent their architectural details as well as large-scale public art commissions. They recently were commissioned to do a piece through the City of Tacoma's Public Art in Depth Program for the Thea Foss Waterway public esplanade. They currently are working on a policemen memorial for the City of Centralia and life-sized sculptures of children for an artist from Hawaii. Their close proximity to specialty auto shops and the newly opened Lemay — America's Car Museum also has prompted them to cater to high-end car enthusiasts looking for reproduction pieces and hood ornaments.

"It's a very rewarding experience to take a concept and make it into something durable and long lasting — a thing of beauty," says Toft. "All our artistic skills are going into the work that is going to be around for a very long time." ©

*Two Ravens Studio is located at 2502 Commerce St. in Tacoma.
Call 253.327.1730 or visit 2ravensstudio.com for more information.*



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