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CREATIVE PROCESS

Hackettstown artist
exhibits masterpieces

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Sculptor John Proaño, of Hackettstown, shows off two of his pieces in the exhibit "Lava Rocks," which is on display at Arts off Main Gallery in Hackettstown and at the Myhelan Cultural Arts Center in Long Valley. Proaño works with various medium, including steel, which the owner of the Hackettstown gallery says is unique.

MIGUEL FARIAS / SPECIAL TO PLUS

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Dreaming of an artistic future

MIGUEL RIERA
PLUS STAFF

Hackettstown sculptor's art on display

HACKETTSTOWN — The dream of Isabella came before the notion of Isabella, artist John Proaño said, referring to a drawing he created after being inspired by a dream.

This particular drawing, the Colombian sculptor said, is the beginning of one of his most ambitious projects. Titled after his recently born daughter, Isabella, Proaño said he sees this as an example of his relentless quest for exploring new machines to express his art and the most important moments of

creativity.

On a late night in April 2005, Proaño said, he woke up with an idea and began to draw a pastel sketch that one day would be turned into a sculpture.

Then, his first daughter was born on April 1, 2006.

The couple wasn't planning for a child back then, according to Proaño. "But now," he said, "looking at the sketch, you can clearly observe the figure of an infant both in the head and with the

ing the sketch around, you see a mother holding a baby.

"To me this was divine inspiration."

A painter since childhood, Proaño began sculpting nearly a decade ago and has been exhibiting his pieces since then. His latest exhibit, "Lava Rocks" is currently on display at Arts off Main Gallery in Hackettstown and at the Myhelan Cultural Arts Center in Long Valley.

The abstract, steel pieces created by Proaño come alive from

metal rods, metal sheets and industrial discard that are transformed into artwork that today can be found in private and corporate collections.

Working with steel

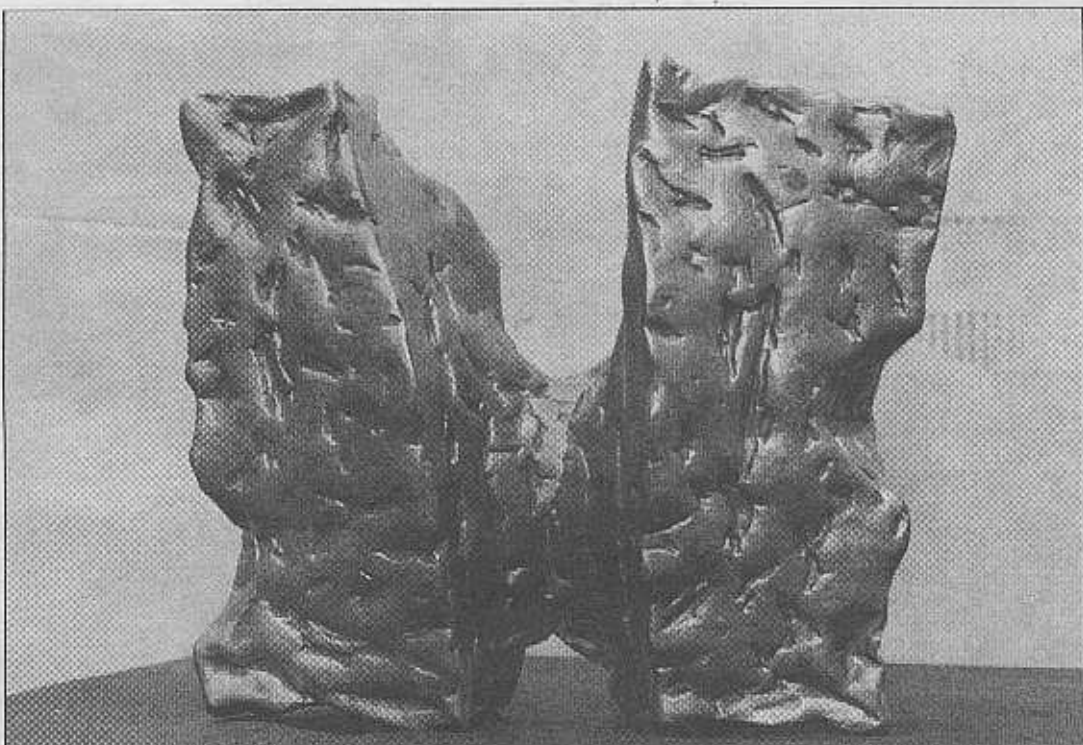
"The art of John," said Michael Sedito, Arts off Main Gallery owner, "is very unique for its form and for the medium utilized." According to Sedito, not many artists choose to work with steel.

If you go

For more information on current and upcoming exhibits at Arts off Main Gallery, 127 Maple Ave., Hackettstown, call (908) 684-4278. For more on the Myhelan Cultural Arts Center, 18 Schooley's Mountain Road, Long Valley, call (908) 876-5959.

with his work, and we hope local residents will look to the gallery and buy original art

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MIGUEL FARIAS / SPECIAL TO PLUS

Proaño, who received his associates degree in arts from County College of Morris and later advanced his studies at the School of Visual Arts in New York, sculpts by heating and cooling steel.

Artist

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rather than a reproduction."

Proaño is one of the first Latino artists to exhibit at Arts off Main, according to Sedito. He said he hopes one day people will get used to the idea of having an art gallery featuring local artists.

"When we opened up back in November last year, I thought I would have a hard time finding local artists, but I was very surprised to see how many there are," Sedito said. "Right now we have 20 local artist exhibiting their work. I think this is good for the business district and for the community.

Kathleen Hofmann, Myhelan Center executive director, said that Proaño's work is interesting because of the medium he uses and the work involved in creating a piece of art out of a block of steel. "It is an amazing process, very different from anything I've seen."

A world traveler, Proaño said his inspiration comes from the great masters and the innumerable museums he has visited on his trips.

"Art is about pushing the envelope and asking the tough questions," said Andrew Ginzel, a professor at the School of Visual Arts in New York City and Proaño's former sculpting instructor.

"John is trying to be a strong artist," Ginzel said. "He has a



Bob Klein, left, listens to Proaño talk about one of his sculptures at the "Lava Rocks" exhibit in Hackettstown. Proaño, a world traveler, said he would love to be able to show his creativity to experts in Murano, Italy, an area recognized for its artistic glass industry.

remarkable amount of energy and a willfulness not to do what everybody else is doing.

"He is a sincere and ambitious young sculptor who is still learning to develop a certain language for his art, but has started very strongly," Ginzel said.

Inspiration from Picasso

Proaño's sculptures are created mainly in steel in a process involving the exposure of the metal to very high temperatures and then low temperatures while working the forms.

"I love the work of Picasso. He is the one artist that has the ability to recreate perfectly the natural expression of the forms, to look beyond and to see things differently, creating his own style, his own way of look-

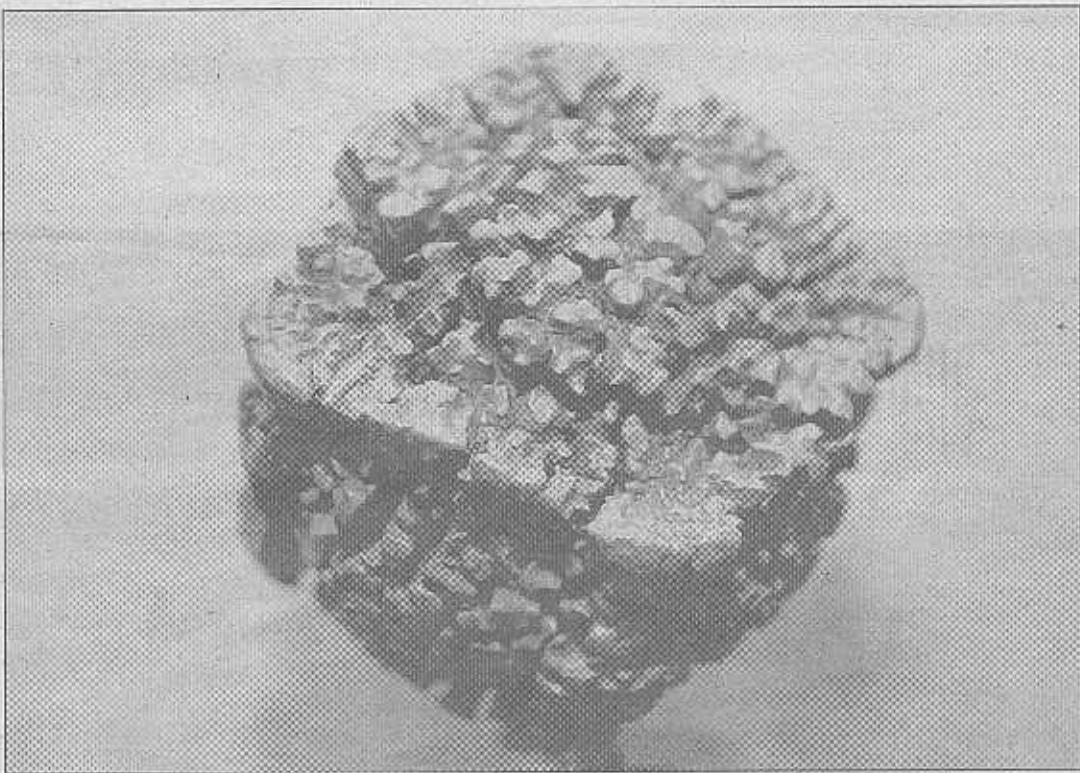
ing at the world," Proaño said.

"Picasso's cubism is my inspiration in many ways as I always look for new techniques to express artistic creativity."

To follow his impulses for exploring new ways of artistic expression, Proaño said he plans to return to Europe and learn about glass art in Murano, Italy. Situated near Venice, a city Proaño loves for its many museums and art galleries, Murano is recognized internationally for its artistic glass industry.

"I would love to bring my concepts and show the experts in Murano my creativity and one day be able to bring the sketch of Isabella to life using glass art

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MIGUEL PARIAS / SPECIAL TO PLUS

This piece is one of the works by Proaño on display at his exhibit, 'Lava Rocks.' Proaño says he is inspired by Picasso, who he thinks the one artist who can recreate perfectly the natural expression of forms.

Artist

CONTINUED FROM / PAGE 4

as the medium," he said.

A full-time, professional graphic designer, Proaño obtained an associates degree in arts from County College of Morris.

He later advanced his studies at the School of Visual Arts in New York.

Artistic genes

"Art is in my genes," Proaño said. "I come from a long line of artists. I think art is a genetic thing in my family," he said, laughing.

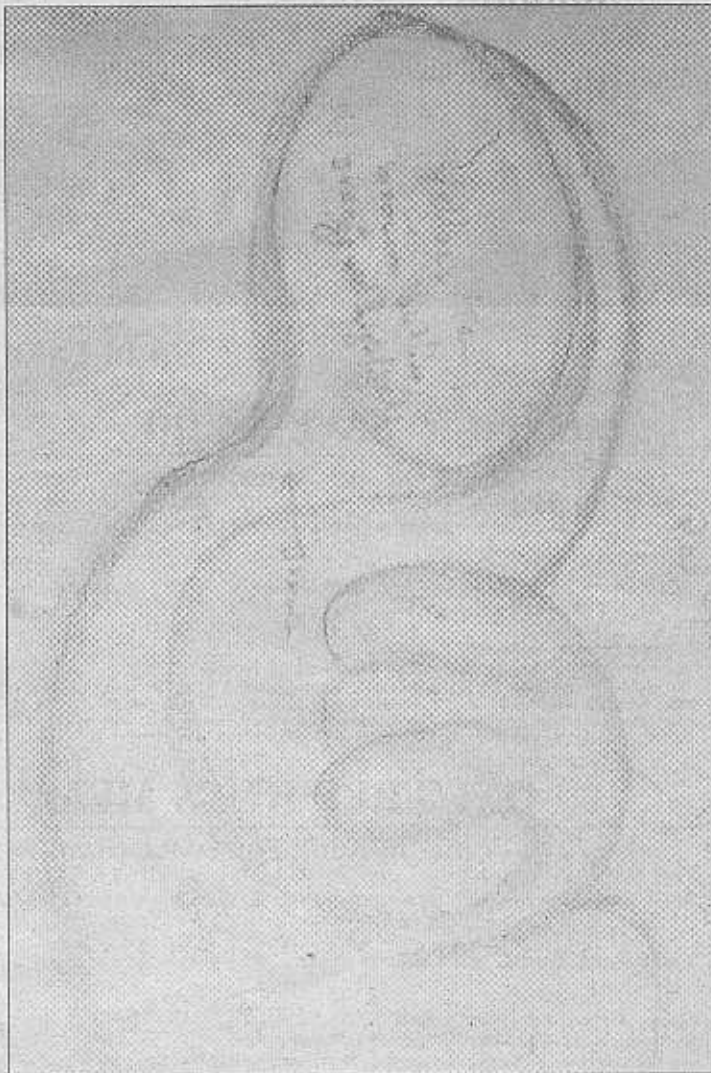
Hofmann said that the Myhelan Cultural Arts Center displays the art of a variety of artists, and Latinos have always been part of the collective exhibits.

"The idea is to infuse arts into everyday life, use art as a tool to build cultural understanding," Hofmann said.

Experimental

"Proaño's work is experimental within his own particular process, that's what makes it especially unique."

"If this was Soho in New York City, Proaño's sculptures would be flying off the shelf," Sedito said.



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This sketch is the inspiration for 'Isabella,' a pastel drawing by Proaño. The idea came to him in a dream in April 2005, almost