

Mac of All Trades

The journey of a
Champlain Valley artist

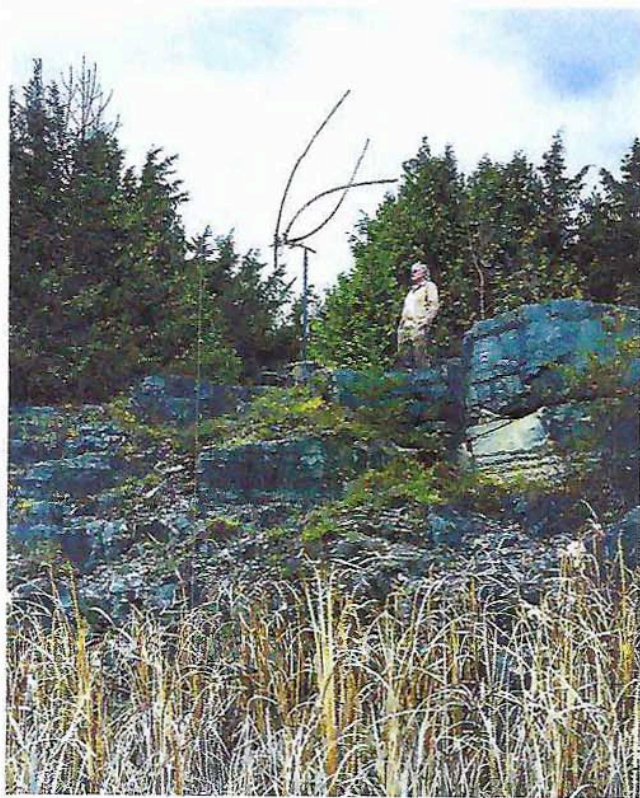
BY CHRISTOPHER LOCKE

In the art world, there's something thrilling, even a little dangerous, about the latest "bad boy" artistic prodigy exploding onto the scene.

Take Essex-based artist Lawrence "Mac" MacDevitt. In just a few short years, Mac has built a formidable reputation: He's a 2024 Individual Artist Grant recipient, courtesy of the Adirondack Lakes Center for the Arts. His *Sky Beams* sculptures debuted at the Essex Quarry Trail and Nature Preserve last fall. (Each of the five pieces has two or three elegantly curved, 12-foot-long laminated cedar beams mounted on a weathered steel stand. Some rotate in the wind.) As an artist-in-residence at Craigardan, an arts organization and working farm in Elizabethtown, Mac worked tirelessly despite a recent knee operation. He's cofounder of Bell Fire Arts, a cutting-edge initiative that organizes and celebrates artists throughout the Adirondacks. And he founded the SpeakEasy storytelling open mic and served as its host for 30 months straight.

So what's next for this unstoppable "enfant terrible?"

Probably his daily nap at four p.m. Mac is 81 years old.



Mac MacDevitt at his Essex studio and with one of his *Sky Beams* sculptures at the Essex Quarry Trail and Nature Preserve.

"Gotta keep those batteries charged," he says with a smile.

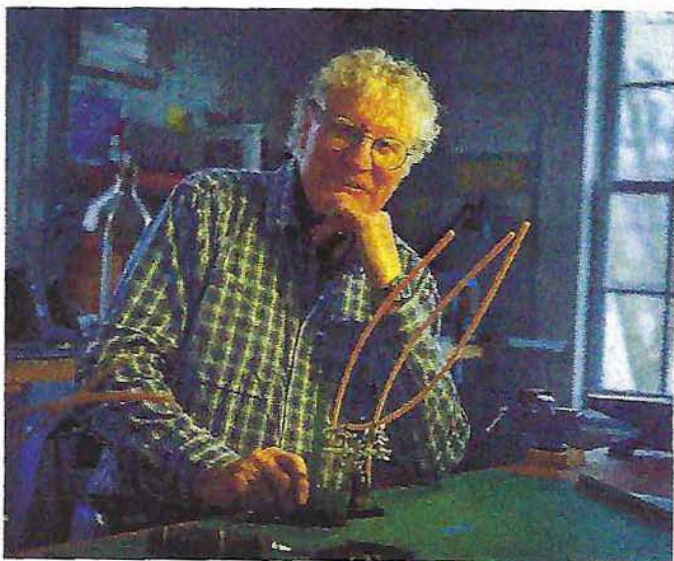
In his living room stands a black, bulbous thing about the size of a coffee table, a geometric oddity that shoots light out of its center—a new project he says he's working on.

It's smaller than his usual work. Mac tends to create large-scale outdoor sculptures. His *Moon Circle* sculpture consists of a six-foot-wide, eight-and-a-half-foot-high hoop made from fiber-glass materials—"rescued from a failed project"—attached to a steel base. The sculpture includes two stools so viewers can position the giant ring and watch the moonrise through it. He set it up in a neighbor's yard, overlooking Lake Champlain; it was later displayed at the Strand Arts Center, in Plattsburgh.

Born in 1944 in New York City, Mac grew up in Great Neck. His dad was a captain in the Army during World War II, which kept Mac from officially meeting his father until he was two years old.

Raised Roman Catholic, Mac was an altar boy until the sixth grade and remembers the nuns with a grimace. He went to Ohio's Oberlin College but dropped out, finishing his bachelor's degree at Shimer College, in Illinois. He earned his master of arts in teaching from Antioch, back in Ohio.

For many years, Mac served as a psychotherapist in Vermont, and it wasn't





Custom Kitchens and Cabinetry for your Adirondack Home



Zobel & co.
KITCHENS...



518-588-1034
zobelandco.com

Adirondack Art



AdirondackArt.org

Hand Painted Adirondack Art and Pet Portraits Painted on Canvas or Antique Saws, Milk Cans, Sap Buckets and more. Custom orders accepted.

until his mid-50s that he began to think about what part, if any, art should play in his life.

"I was at my monthly men's group when I suddenly thought, Oh, my god, if I died tomorrow, would I feel I did everything I was supposed to do?"

With no formal art training, Mac dove in; he got an apprenticeship at Bread & Puppet Theater, in Glover, Vermont, and spent a summer crafting and performing with puppets.

He tried different styles of creative expression, never concerned with any perceived "success." He hand-built an ambitious piece called a Sky Yurt and presented a large prototype at the Maker Faire at Shelburne Farms in 2013. But after a sudden crack in the yurt's "ribs," he discovered the beams couldn't support their own weight. His response: no biggie. He had a website for the project detailing its progress—and setbacks—with one entry, entitled "I ain't no designer," asking for suggestions.

The SpeakEazy storytelling series—originally hosted by Whitcomb's Arts, in Whallonsburg, and now at Plattsburgh's Old Soul Design Shop—was inspired by the time Mac and his wife of 40 years, Darla, lived in Chicago. The city has a vibrant storytelling scene that Mac says he wanted to replicate here. At the open mics, farmers, grandmothers, academics and teenagers sign up for seven minutes on stage. Some stories are hilarious, others heartbreaking, but one thing remains the same: "We are obnoxiously supportive of the tellers, and we give them a judgment-free platform."

When it comes to art, Mac says he's "inspired by what is around me. I like to recycle and reuse. I also get hooked on an object, like a simple red Ikea kitchen chair. I have a few more chairs now and I have an idea for a new sculpture."

He adds, "I used to be in a relationship with a woman many years ago who said, 'Why can't we be like everybody else?' But Darla told me early on, 'I never want us to be like everybody else.'" ▲

See Mac MacDevitt's *Sky Beams* sculptures at the Essex Quarry Trail and Nature Preserve, on Lake Shore Road.