

## Rhythms of Leri's Work Evoke a Sense of Music

**By Pat Rogers**

There's something about Dennis Leri's art that conjures music.

Maybe it's the way the shapes relate to each other while encouraging the eye to move from one to the next.

Or maybe it's the way peaks slide into valleys and then leap back up again, weaving an entire composition. Or maybe it's the visual repetition, punctuated by texture. No matter whether the artist is working in steel, burnt wood or paint, the sense of rhythm is hard to miss.

Mr. Leri says that he doesn't set out to mimic music—the only muse he follows is an instinctual one born from his emotions and defined by the shapes he works with. Intuitively, the pieces of metal he typically collages find their natural home.

"It's like playing solitaire," he said in an interview at his Springs studio. "It's very clear where the jack is supposed to go. It's a natural progression when you're being true to yourself."

Mr. Leri continues to assess each composition until it is finished saying what it needs to say. Beneath his instinct is knowledge of technique, art history and principles of design.

"Art is a process, not a product," he said. "If you look for the end, it destroys the creative process ... I know when the composition is done when I see me looking back at me. That's when I know I should stop working."

Mr. Leri is known for his wall pieces made up of collaged steel shapes. For the last few years, these shapes have been geometric. Before turning his hand to steel wall sculptures around six years ago, he was primarily a mixed media painter.

A series of wall sculptures made up of dark metal pieces sandwiched together is titled "Urban Cadence." The piece evokes Manhattan's landscape of towering buildings forming brick or steel canyons. Each artwork in the series represents different parts of New York and the way the neighborhood buildings and streets vary. Other wall sculptures of steel conjure newspaper articles, religious gatherings, relationships, beach scenes and windows to peer into another's private world.

Mr. Leri grew up in Brooklyn and still spends time in New York City. All of his life experiences translate into his work in ways that aren't particularly obvious, even to the artist.

Consider, for example, his newest sculpture. A radical departure in presentation and shape, the work has two distinct planes. One is angled; the other forms the base. Curved and rounded shapes and cutouts abound near the top and energy seems to jump and hopscotch. The sculpture will be on display in the "Vito Sisti Presents" exhibition opening at Ashawagh Hall on September 8.

"I don't create stories or a narrative," he said. "My art doesn't work that way. These are emotions. I can't explain them, but I know it's me. I don't need to know specifically what emotions. No matter what happens, the process always delights me."

Another departure from his steel compositions can be seen in the current Surface Library gallery show, "Co-Existence." While Mr. Leri's signature rectangular shapes arrayed next to each other are evident, the material is not steel. The series was created from wood scraps that are a by-product of his method of cutting metal for his sculptures. Noticing a pile of these pieces in his studio one day, he decided to see what could happen.

"They have a rhythm like music," he said. "Each has its own song. I saw the rhythm in these things and just tried to bring it out."

To do so, Mr. Leri used a torch to burn the wood, then cleaned the surface and waxed it to give it an appealing finish. The wood pieces were initially placed side by side. Through the building process and following a natural progression, texture was allowed to come through and added a subtle kick to the work.

Allowing the materials to lead, following visual cues and being open to chance has also led Mr. Leri to work on a larger scale than ever before. He has created a series of outdoor sculptures that depart visually from his wall sculptures and paintings, yet stay true to the material and the large space they are designed to occupy.

Learning how to translate small models into sprawling or tall sculptures has been a process of exploration. Mr. Leri said he strives to infuse his outdoor works with energy and a sense of motion. To accomplish this, he creates seethrough spaces and planes of steel that seem to slide from one to the other.

"When it gets big, it's bulkier and they look too dense," he said. "I like to be able to look through the work. It gives them a feeling of lightness."

Mr. Leri's work is currently on view at Surface Library, 845 Springs Fireplace Road, Springs, through September 2. He will be part of the group show, "Vito Sisti Presents" at Ashawagh Hall in Springs from September 8 through September 16.

Mr. Leri has exhibited frequently in Brooklyn, Manhattan and on the East End. Locally, his work has been shown at Gone Local Gallery in Amagansett, Solar Gallery in East Hampton, Silas Marder Gallery in Bridgehampton, and others. His work can be viewed at [www.DennisLeri.com](http://www.DennisLeri.com). He has taught at the Art Barge in Amagansett and continues to give private group lessons. For information, call 324-2701.



ArtistDennisLeriinhisSpringsstudio.