



Tampa Bay Times

French artist draws inspiration for sculptures from Tampa's Columbus Drive Bridge

By Lennie Bennett, Times Art Critic

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Old metal from the Columbus Drive Bridge was used to create Galileo's Moons, its surface made richer by the varying tones of the metal caused by age. [Images from Bleu Acier]

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TAMPA

Dominique Labauvie's spare, elegant sculptures create a visual dialogue about volume and void with a delicacy that makes the heavy steel seem to float. His newest work is also grounded in local history.

Two new sculptures are made from discarded pieces of the historic Columbus Drive Bridge in Tampa, which is undergoing renovations. Built in the 1920s, it's one of only a handful of swing bridges in Florida, pivoting horizontally to allow tall boats to pass through rather than using the more common drawbridge method. Much of the original metal, manufactured by Carnegie Steel, is being replaced, and Labauvie was able to obtain some of the old parts.

"They aren't homages to the bridge," he says, but the hand-welded sculptures, which he pairs under the title *A Gift from the River*, do suggest the bridge's horizontal lines and movement. The metal strips are pierced by holes that once held bolts, and they, too, add a rhythmic element. Anchoring both sculptures are steel orbs, old cannonballs made by Royal Steel in Illinois.

"I'm very proud that all the materials are made in America," Labauvie says. He moved to Tampa in 1998 with his wife, Erika Schneider, an American who is a master printer, and their daughter, 16.

They sold their farm in France and bought a 1925 building (about the same age as the bridge and not far from it), spending several years renovating it into a live-work space that included a print atelier for her and a studio for him. They named it Bleu Acier (bluh a-ZHAY), French for blue steel, which refers to the moment when intense heat turns steel blue. It was a metaphor for the transformational power of art and a nod to Labauvie's sculptures. Labauvie and Schneider both have international reputations and most of their clients are from Europe and Asia. They're represented by galleries in New York, but they like the pace of life in Florida.

The latest works are destined for a New York gallery but you can see them during two viewings that will be open to the public.

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Dominique Labauvie's Venus Walks is a minimalist interpretation of the Tampa skyline. The top bar's circular holes reminded him of Venus' recent transit across the sun.