

"Canada is a very fertile ground for artistic development because Canadians are very unpretentious and optimistic," said Hide.

Another factor is the easy availability and variety of mild steel, mainly due to Alberta's oil industry. "There's scrap metal available in all kinds of weird shapes," said Hide. "Alberta is just a good place for steel because of the oil industry. Steel is easy to get a hold of and it comes in a variety of shapes."

In steel sculpture the artist cuts and welds together pieces of scrap metal using ordinary industrial welding torches. When applicable the sculptor would incorporate the natural shape of the scrap metal in the sculpture with a minimum of cutting and shaping, hence the convenience of scrap metal in a variety of shapes and sizes.

Hide also singled out the support of Edmonton Art Gallery director Terry Fenton as particularly instrumental to the development of Edmonton's Steel sculpture school. "Fenton's always been interested and has sponsored this kind of art," said Hide. "Fenton's brought in good US and English art, and has given us good criticism. The art gallery under him has also bought and shown works of the Edmonton school."

But probably the most important factor in the development of the Edmonton school has been Hide himself. Not only is he a formidable sculptor, but Hide has taught most of the other artists who compose the school.

Hide has been working in steel since 1964 when he enrolled at St. Martin's (in London) to study under Anthony Caro who was "the most exciting force in sculpture at the time."

"Caro would come round once a week and criticize our work," said Hide. "He has an open lyric sort of work more concerned with spaces, while I felt unable to fit into that style and slowly developed a style of my own which has much more to do with weight and mass."

Space versus mass; Hide developed his distinctive style, moving away from his mentor just as Caro had developed his techniques of steel sculpture as a reaction to his mentor Henry Moore.

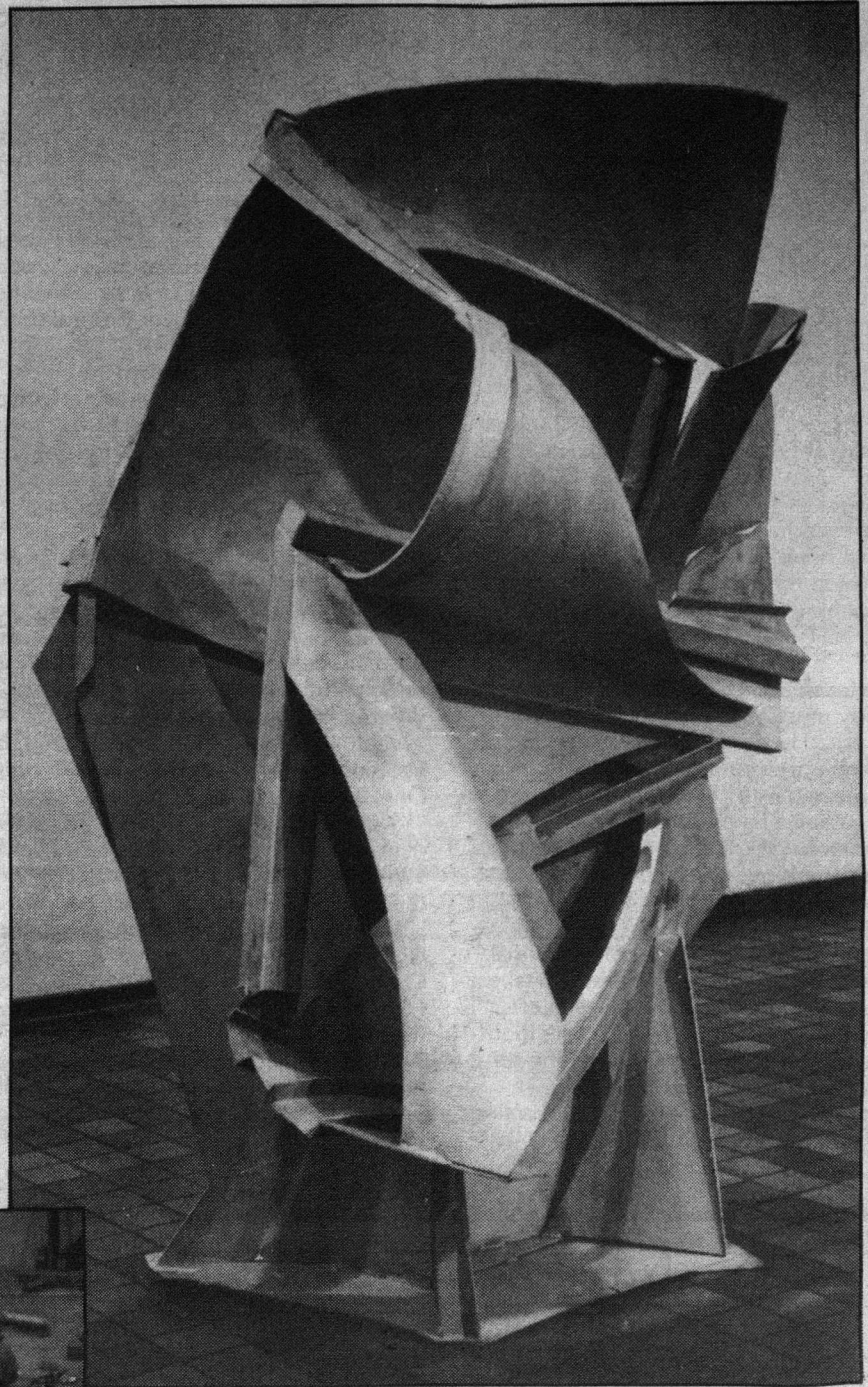
"An artist learns by emulating his teacher's style and then eventually transforming that style into his own — that's how I learnt, and that's how I teach my students."

Hide describes his work as "monumental sculpture", since his works vary from 500 lbs all the way up to 2500 lbs. "I do large sculptures," he said. Hide puts his work in perspective by mentioning how many of the masters did huge sculptures, giving Michaelangelo as an example.

As for the future, Hides sees himself continuing his work in steel, but sees the Edmonton school as lasting "another 10 years".

But for now Hide agrees with his mentor Caro who believes that the Edmonton school has taken over the development of steel sculpture. "You can even say that it's the only school."

"It's quite possible that the best sculptors of the 20th century will be seen to have worked mainly in this medium," said Hide.



Photos by Greg McHarg



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