

HUMANS OF MOUNTMAKING

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LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, USA



INTERNATIONAL
MOUNTMAKERS
FORUM

TIM SKORNIA

In addition to being part of the IMF team responsible for hosting the 2020 IMF conference at the Getty, Tim Skornia is a sculptor, a master welder, a great storyteller and a dedicated family man. Here we discuss his past, present and his dedication to creating education opportunities in our community.

Shelly: How did you find your way to the mount making profession? What sort of education or professional experience did you have to start your mount making career?

Tim: I have a degree in Sculpture. I worked as a welder and metal fabricator for years before becoming a mount maker.

To be honest, I kind of fell into it. I saw a job opening for a mountmaking position at the St. Louis Art Museum and I applied. Maybe 9 months or a year went by with no reply. I was teaching at the time; as a welding instructor, and I got a call out of the blue to be a mount maker. I was just getting my bearings with the teaching, but I didn't know if I'd ever get this opportunity again, because it's such a small field. It was less money than I had been making, but it didn't matter. I went and I tried it anyway. Fortunately for me, I had built just about anything under the sun outside of mounts. So, I really just kind of fell into mountmaking.

I remember when I first started, I would sit and read everything I possibly could about mountmaking. I didn't have anybody to teach me, I was already a pretty good welder and a pretty good metalsmith. I knew a lot about metal, but I had to learn about the complexities of different artworks and how to mesh this creatively with fragile objects.

Art was what had interested me in the first place, and brought me to metals and sculpting and all that. So with mountmaking, all the designing, fabricating, execution, installation, that's the fun part. It's being able to pull everything together for installations or large exhibitions. It's pretty intense, and it's never been the same twice. It's not boring, and we're constantly learning new things in this field and implementing them.

WHERE THE MAGIC HAPPENS

LEFT: Machine shop workspace at Getty Villa Museum, Los Angeles, California
(COVER IMAGE: Tim lathing in the Getty workshop.)



TIM SKORNIA

Shelly: What does your day-to-day work look like? What type of objects are you working with? Do you work very independently or is the work more team-based?

Tim: I work entirely with antiquities now, so very small to very large ancient objects. We work as a team to problem solve but the fabrication aspect is done independently for the most part.

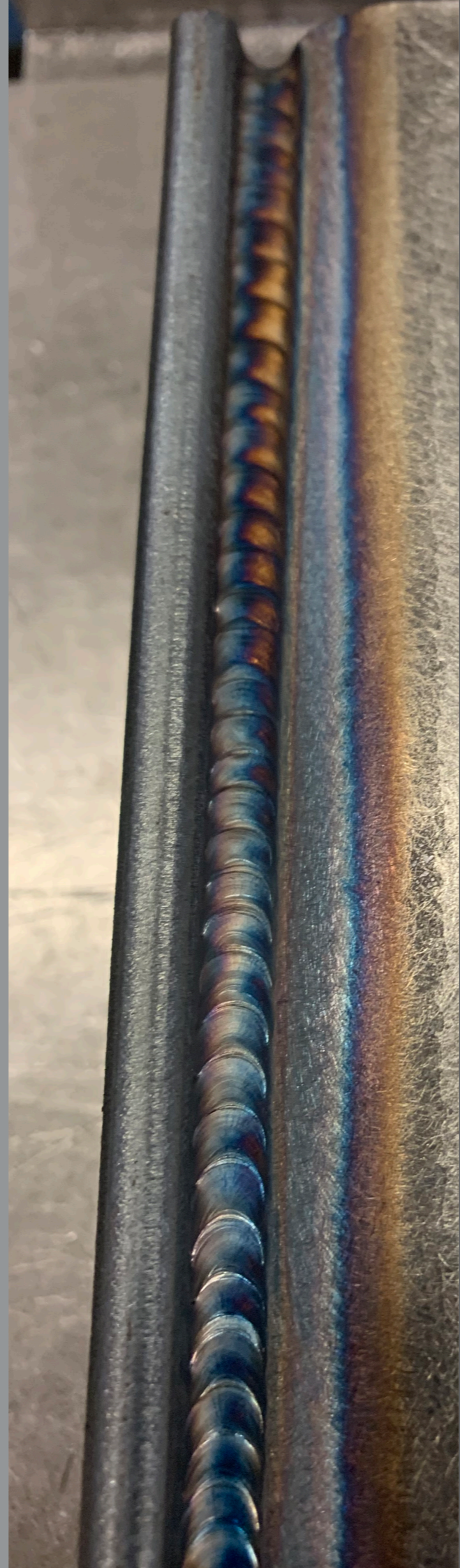
Shelly: Is the way that you're working now at the Getty Villa the same kind of approach that you had in St. Louis or other places that you've worked?

Tim: The right answer is that you treat every object the same and every exhibition the same. St. Louis is in a seismic region, so I was creating seismic mounts there too. The big difference is the case design here, the time, the awareness, the willingness to disguise the mounts so much more extensively than there. I can do a lot underneath the cases, and that helps tremendously. It takes a little bit more time but the overall look is amazing.

The exhibition schedule here is a lot more object heavy. I mean, we only deal with objects. In St. Louis, it's an encyclopedic museum, some 2d and a lot of contemporary art work. The range that you have here, can be multi ton pieces to fragile little pieces of iron that are thousands of years old. So a pretty vast difference I would say.

They have a good team of installers in St. Louis, but here there are other mount makers. I had never worked with other mount makers until I got to Getty. Having other minds around helps tremendously so you're not having to think on your own all the time.

WELD IT
Tig weld on mild steel



“DON'T STOP LEARNING! EVEN IF YOU'RE NOT MAKING MOUNTS, JUST KEEP MAKING.”

TIM SKORNIYA

Shelly: What are your favorite and least favorite things about your work?

Tim: My favorite aspect of my job is the creation/fabrication aspect along with complex problem solving. It doesn't feel like work to me most of the time.

My least favorite would have to be the administrative portion of my job. It's probably the most necessary, but it's just not the most appealing. It's part of the job, and at the end of the day, it makes it worthwhile because you're building up relationships with colleagues and other institutions, and it makes us all better, and it makes me better.

Shelly: Do you have a favorite object or exhibition that you've worked on? What made it stand out to you?

Tim: I don't think that I have a favorite show but one that stands out was a show back in St. Louis called Sunken Cities. Very large Egyptian sculptures that were challenging and we had our third kid during the install yikes!

Shelly: I know you are a staff mount maker now, but have you ever worked as a freelance mount maker?

Tim: I have done a good amount of freelance work as a mount maker and metal fabricator.

Shelly: Have you worked at other institutions or companies as a mount maker? In your previous mountmaking work, were you always working within a conservation department, or have you worked under other departments before? If so, has that affected your day-to-day work?

Tim: Yes, I have worked at different institutions and the responsibilities have varied mostly because of title changes. The big difference was the amount of responsibility. There are more things to manage at the Getty but also more resources. In St. Louis, I worked under installation and art preparation. Working within conservation, you have a more stable voice. The work has to do with object safety, so mountmaking stays on a balanced plane. Within the installation department, there were more ups and downs. I didn't always have direct access to planning meetings, so I sometimes missed discussions I should have been part of. Another difference is that in conservation, there's an expectation of sharing information that's built into the department protocols. That was a big selling point for me coming here.



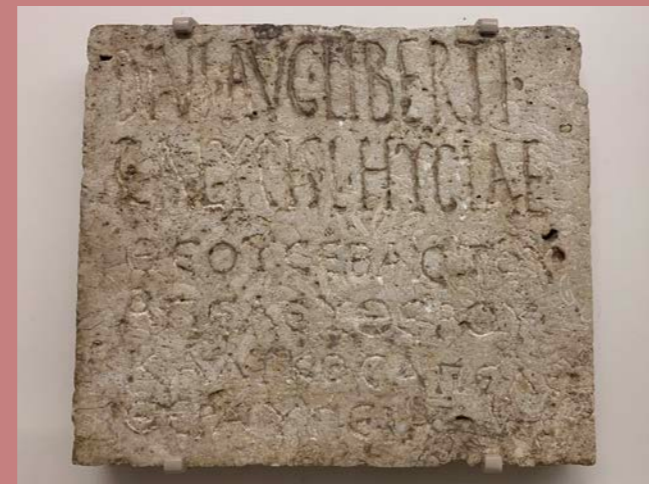
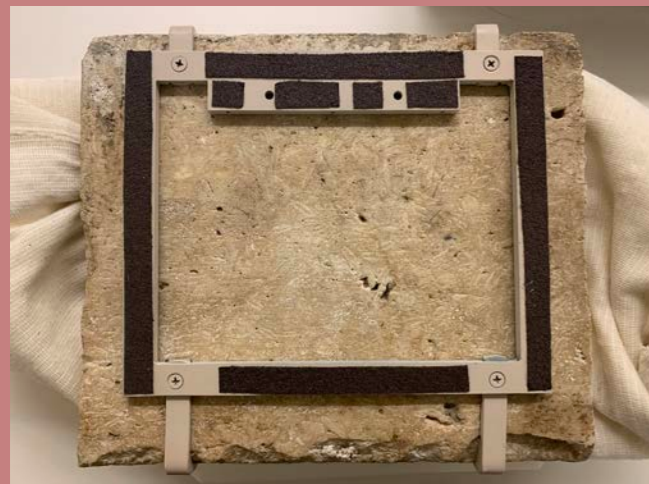
MOUNT SPOTLIGHT

LEFT: Original Ushabti and 3D Printed replica
RIGHT: 3D Printed replica



MOUNT SPOTLIGHT

LEFT: Decorative Arts object with internal mount
RIGHT: Decorative Arts object installed



MOUNT SPOTLIGHT

LEFT: Stainless steel frame mount with cleat system
RIGHT: Stone piece with inscription with mount



MOUNT SPOTLIGHT

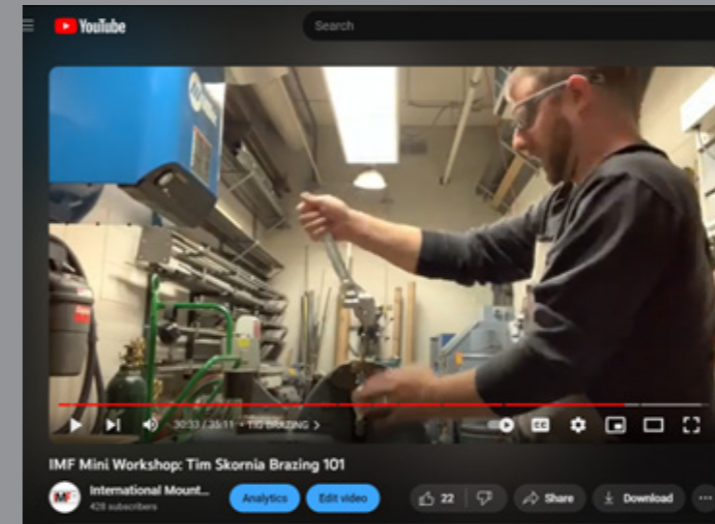
LEFT: Antiquities object with internal mount
RIGHT: Antiquities object installed

TIM SKORNIA



TIM AND HIS FAMILY

Tim with Victoria, Elias, Maria, and Simon



TIM IS BRAZIN'

Tim led a fabulous workshop for the IMF & you should check it out at the link below:

[Tim's Brazing 101 Workshop](#)

Shelly: What is your role in the IMF?

Tim: I don't know, maybe you could call me an educator. I would like to help create more workshops, mostly working on fabrication skills and technical experience sharing. My hope for the IMF is that it will be used as a growing tool not just for the individual but for the mountmaking community. We will all get better and gain more respect for our colleagues, employers and institutions by sharing and not living on an island in our personal workspaces.

Shelly: Yes! Your 2021 "Intro to Brazing" workshop is great! What would you like to do next or what skills do you think we should focus on next?

Tim: I wonder if we could break some of the longer videos up into shorter skill-focused ones, like 15 min or 10 min, so that we could get more audience. Many people don't have time to sit and watch 30 minutes. Welding would be a little easier because it's visually fun. You're going to see sparks, that's always fun! Maybe a short video on 3d scanning and printing for mount making.

Shelly: Exactly, because you can find tons of general machining info out there already. Keeping the focus on how the techniques are useful or why you use them, in your practice for mount making would be super interesting. Along these lines, do you have any advice for people just starting out in mountmaking?

Tim: Read what you can about what we do and as many times as you need to. Then make what you can. Then do it again and again! Don't stop learning! Even if you're not making mounts, just keep making. Keep that part of your brain active. Communication between the hands and the brain is important for any maker.

Shelly: Where do you see the future of mount making heading?

Tim: I hope with what has been happening in the last few years with social media and the IMF that we gain more credibility within the Museum world. It can only get better and grow more with more visibility.

Tim: It's always good to have room to grow. I think having an internship program established at a few places is a good start. Hopefully, we can begin to lengthen the program. Right now at Getty it's only ten weeks long, but it's a start. Not everyone that does an internship will be placed in a job right away, but it's still better than nothing.

A lot of people can't afford to pay for a weeklong seminar, or they don't live in this country, so it would be great to help create a library of free courses. I would hope that we can continue doing what we are doing. Maybe a little more breakdown of mount making from beginning to end.

Shelly: There's so much potential there. Would you like to share anything else about your job or the field in general?

Tim: Keep making even if it's not mounts!



This series was inspired by the AIC-ECPN's @humans_of_conservation Instagram series. We are grateful to them and expand on their idea with their permission.