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SOULFUL SPIRITS

DANIEL BELARDINELLI
DISORDERED & DRIVEN

OSCAR
FRONTIER ARTIST

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CHOKING HAZARD - Small Parts
Not Recommended Under 3 years.



TED LUDWICZAK'S SOULFUL SPIRITS FROM STONE

Edward M. Gomez visits the Polish-born sculptor at his waterside home in New York's Hudson River Valley



Ted Ludwiczak was just about to turn thirty when he arrived in the United States after World War II. A well-educated young man – speaking Polish, German and some English – he had studied economics in his native Poland and had worked with the American military during the Allies' postwar occupation of Germany.

He headed to New York, where relatives who had already immigrated to the US helped him become settled; in time, he would co-found and for several decades co-manage a laboratory that developed contact lenses. Ludwiczak married, became a father and, ultimately, realised a classic version of the American Dream, eventually finding and moving into the modest house he now

occupies, alone, in his retirement. The house is located in Rockland County, in the state of New York, about 58 kilometres north-west of New York City, on the west bank of the Hudson River.

That majestic waterway, which 17th-century European newcomers to the region compared to the Rhine, and which has played such an indelible role in American history, is literally Ludwiczak's backyard – or maybe it is actually his front yard, depending on how a visitor views his riverbank home, which hugs the edge of a quiet, residential street and is surrounded on two sides by narrow patches of garden and, in the back (or the front), by all that water.

'As I carved each face, I fell in love with the way a distinct personality emerged'



All Photographs by Edward M. Gómez.

Edward M. Gómez, a critic, author and curator based in New York and in Tokyo, has worked as an environmental activist in New York's Hudson Valley region.







'Back in the 1980s, I decided to build a retaining wall to prevent the yard, which slopes down to the water from a higher elevation, from eroding and slipping into the river,' Ludwiczak recalls. His property is situated along a short stretch of the Hudson in which, at the water's edge, the land is at the same elevation as the water, forming a beach. Using a construction method that is common in the New England region of the US, Ludwiczak stacked flat stones, without mortar, to create a holding wall. He hauled the material out of the river's shallow bank area, the same kind of reddish rock that was used to build New York City's famous brownstone townhouses in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Using chunks of this rock, Ludwiczak made his first stone carvings as decorations to adorn a section of his retaining wall that contains a lookout stand. The self-taught sculptor says: 'I called the first three heads that I carved the *Three Stooges*, after the comedians who were so popular a long time ago. As I carved each face, I fell in love with the way a distinct personality emerged, and I've been carving stone heads ever since.'

Ludwiczak's studio is nothing more than a tiny table that touches the side of his house, loaded down with tools and surrounded by works-in-progress and finished pieces of varying sizes. He uses a limited number of tools, including chisels, hammers and rasps, and says he tries not to impose a face or a style on his material as much as he seeks to respond to the 'spirit of each stone' – to be guided by each piece's aura and texture, and thereby to give visible form to the character or personality he feels may be emanating from it. 'I'm here every day,' the artist says of his compact, humble, outdoor workspace. He says: 'I'm here even in the winter, when it's dry and bright enough to go outside.'

The simplicity of Ludwiczak's carvings, which feature almond-shaped eyes, noses that are long and pointed, or flat, or broad and bulbous, and an infinite array of head shapes, belies the expressive power of the multitude of faces he has conjured up out of rough stone over many years of daily, diligent labour. More precisely, though, as Ludwiczak enthusiastically points out to a visitor, the locally based documentary film-maker Cherie Raglin, 'Except for hauling the stones up from the river, which is great exercise for me, my stone carving isn't work at all – it's pure pleasure.'

Last summer, *Outside In*, a short film Raglin produced about several self-taught artists, including Ludwiczak, who live and work in the mid-Hudson Valley region, was shown at the GAGA Arts Center in Garnerville, New York, a small town near the sculptor's home. Housed in part of a complex of former factory buildings dating from the late 1800s, the arts centre is situated next to a broad, tree-shaded creek. There, GAGA's directors are installing a sculpture garden in which a collection of several dozen (or, prospective donations of the actual artworks permitting, perhaps even several hundred) of Ludwiczak's stone carvings will be given a permanent home. 'The character and quality of Ted's sculptures will contribute in a major way to the look and ambience of the sculpture garden,' observes James Tyler, an academically trained sculptor who serves as GAGA's director.

When told about the prominent place his art will occupy in the cultural centre's sculpture garden, for which landscaping is now under way, Ludwiczak smiles and admits, with genuine humility, that he hesitates to call himself an 'artist' at all. Instead, he explains, sounding very much like the unmistakably inventive artist and skilled craftsman that he is, 'I'm just happiest – and I feel the most at peace and the most connected with the river and this place – when I'm handling and carving my stones.'



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Facing and previous pages

Ludwiczak's stone carvings fill the yard surrounding his modest house on the west bank of the Hudson River.

below

Ludwiczak's property slopes down and meets the water's edge at a narrow, rocky beach. There he hauls stones out of the river and uses them to make his sculptures.

