

See Dominique Labauvie's steel sculptures at Tampa Museum of Art

By Lennie Bennett, Times Art Critic
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ABOVE: Dominique Labauvie, *Suspended Skyline*, 2010, forged and waxed steel

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Most of Dominique Labauvie's sculptures are a contradiction. Forged from tough steel, they appear as fragile trceries, more about void than mass. They finally have an appropriate setting in a large gallery at the Tampa Museum of Art. • Labauvie is better known in art capitals — especially Paris, where his work is in several museum collections — than in Tampa. He and his wife, master printer Erika Greenberg-Schneider, live here but rarely exhibit their art locally; most of their patrons live elsewhere. So kudos to Todd Smith, the museum's director, for curating a show of fine contemporary sculpture that didn't have to be imported.

The works are like three-dimensional drawings and share the same linear elegance as Matisse's later prints in black and white that we saw at the museum earlier this year. So no surprise that Labauvie draws as well as sculpts, and a huge example of that medium

covers one of the gallery walls. It's done in pastel and charcoal, thickly worked so the blacks look like velvet and the tawny browns like animal fur. The forms mimic those in the sculptures but sometimes seem more solid.

The titles are literal, as if to assist in making figurative connections to the abstract. You don't really need them, though the artist clearly wants to imbue his work with narrative.

Kendama, for example, is playful, like the Japanese game of the same name in which you toss a hollow-core wooden ball into the air and try to spear it on a handheld spike. The sculpture vaguely resembles a human figure holding what could be the two game components. Or the entire sculpture could be a loose interpretation of the game itself.

Like *Kendama* (game and art), all the sculptures perform balancing acts. They often look as if they're about to teeter but never do. *Hephaistos Tears* juxtaposes three horizontal bars forged onto three vertical supports that look about to bobble and buckle. *Bury the Hatchet* has just two supports that link its angular shape to the ground.

Hephaistos, incidentally, is a name better known to us as Vulcan, Greek god of metal-working. Another reference to Labauvie's use of iron is the sculpture *Air Fer Mer*. "Fer" and "mer" translate from French to English as iron and sea, and the work can be interpreted as bodies of sky and water bisected by a horizon line, the "fer," which also connects everything.

Labauvie created a site-specific sculpture for the show, a large "landscape" with thick, undulating steel bands separated by thin tubes.

The museum's outdoor terrace, with a beautiful view of the Hillsborough River, the downtown skyscrapers and the University of Tampa, is in service for the first time as a sculpture area with three of Labauvie's largest pieces sited there. *Twist* and *Plugged* are especially marvelous. In *Twist*, for example, shapely legs rise to meet rough bands of metal that look like layered petticoats. I didn't even try to decipher the reason for their titles; they work perfectly as pure abstract forms.

Labauvie chose as part of the title for the exhibition "Musical Lines." Though the titles of individual works don't reference musical works, it's an apt name for his sculptures. Let your eye and mind roam and you perceive in the flowing lines that thicken and attenuate the sense of a composition that hits all the right notes.

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If you go the exhibit "Musical Lines in My Hands: The Work of Dominique Labauvie" is at the Tampa Museum of Art, 120 W Gasparilla Plaza, Tampa, through Jan. 16. Hours are 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday with extended hours until 9 p.m. on Thursday, and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Admission is \$10 adults, \$7.50 seniors, military and Florida educators, and \$5 students over 6. Pay what you will every second Saturday from 9 to 11 a.m. and every Thursday from 5 to 9 p.m. Parking is in adjacent Poe Garage. tampamuseum.org or (813) 274-8130.