

# Everyday Objects: The Evolution and Innovations of Joseph Anderson

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## Joseph Anderson Biography

Artist-blacksmith and sculptor, Joseph Anderson, began his life in Minnesota. His father's favorite hobby was gunsmithing, and the family home had a small shop in the basement. Joseph's father died when he was 11 years old. With no one to stop him, the shop became his playground. It was here that Joseph first began to experiment with metalworking. His jewelry-making apprenticeship began in 1967, with an afternoon learning silver soldering from his older brother, who was home for a visit. With that information, he taught himself the rest using pictures in a book from the 1950s on Native American silversmithing. For pocket money he made small animal sculptures from repurposed utensils, which he sold to teachers and friends. He also began doing clock and jewelry repair for his stepfather's jewelry store. He attended an experimental high school where he was allowed large blocks of time to develop skills in the art room and metal shop. While still in high school, he began teaching silversmithing and pottery, which he learned in New Mexico at the age of 15. He took classes from the best potters in the area to stay ahead of other students.

After completing high school, Joseph began an 8,000-mile hitchhiking trip across America and Canada. At a stop in San Francisco, he saw artisans selling their art on the streets and decided to move there himself. He moved back to Minnesota for a short time, working in an iron foundry to earn enough money for his move. In 1973, he officially moved to San Francisco and started his own jewelry business. After four years as a jeweler, in 1977 Joseph set aside his business and began exclusively forging with hot iron. He focused on functional ironwork for the home. His first business as a blacksmith was called "Simply Spoons." Joseph has stated that repeatedly creating the same utensil handle allowed him the necessary practice to understand how to manipulate hot iron. At first, he did not have the technical knowledge to even make a rack to hold the spoons he sold. It took years of practice and experimentation, along with the encouragement of other blacksmiths, to develop his craft. He began traveling to craft fairs throughout the country to sell his forged utensils. The main material used was iron, but he also forged with stainless steel for the convenience of his clients. Each utensil starts as a single, small block of material. The forging process allows for a simple block to be stretched and shaped, drastically changing its appearance without changing its mass. His simple spoons and serving utensils began to evolve. Figurative, animal and abstract forms were added, imbuing each utensil with individual character. Joseph's utensils sold successfully at craft fairs for many years.

Through the process of creating utensils, furniture, lighting and architectural pieces, Joseph began to experiment heavily with line – a constant visual theme throughout his career. By the early 1990s, he began to produce sculpture along with his utilitarian work. In the 2000's, he began to focus exclusively on sculpture. Joseph's work with line developed to the point of creating large bird forms. The forging process allowed for the hot iron to be stretched into calligraphic lines to add volume, while still maintaining a minimal style. Over the years, his bird sculptures evolved to become purely abstract. These sculptures are an exploration of line and a study of movement. Everything is minimalist in style, often taking just a few forged lines to complete the full form. The amount of work involved is not evident in the finished product. He makes full use of his material, showing the full potential of forging with hot iron.

Joseph now lives in North Carolina. He has taught, demonstrated and lectured at numerous national and international blacksmithing conferences since 1980. He has also lectured at Stanford University, Stanford, CA, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC and University of Evansville, Evansville, IN. Joseph has served as President of the California Blacksmithing Association and on the board of the Stokes County Arts Commission in North Carolina. He is a member of the Piedmont Craftsmen, the American Crafts Council and the Artist-Blacksmiths Association of North America (ABANA). His work of more than 30 years is represented in countless collections throughout the world.

## **Process**

Joseph works in a unique and experimental way. He produces most of his work alone, making use of large tools like pneumatic hammers. His sculptures often begin as a rough sketch in chalk on his shop floor. He creates the main body of his sculptures through forging, heating the iron to around 2300 degrees Fahrenheit. This allows the iron to become malleable. After the main body of the sculpture is complete, he next forges calligraphic lines to add dimensionality. Each line is forged spontaneously then tack-welded onto the main body of the sculpture. The sculpture develops organically in this way, allowing for changes in structure. Once he is satisfied with the form of the sculpture, the lines are disassembled and then welded in place. The welds are ground and the sculpture finished by sand-blasting and adding a patina, clear sealer, primer or paint. Sculptures are generally created in one extended period so the development of the lines is a reflection of himself in a particular moment.