



**Water Walking** - 2009  
 cast bronze and laser cut steel  
 Ring 26" d x 3" deep  
 Wolfe 45" w x 20" h



**Savage - Salvage** - 2009  
 cast aluminum and stamped steel stars  
 47.5" w x 16" h

Photo Credits: John McEwen  
 Layout: CWT&R Design

GALLERY PAGE AND STRANGE is a contemporary gallery located in the historic Granville Square of downtown Halifax, Nova Scotia. In close proximity to NSCAD University and other fine art shops and restaurants, the gallery is situated within the heart of the cultural district of the city.

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# JOHN McEWEN

## OCEAN MIND / OCEAN STORIES

May 1 - 22, 2009

GALLERY  
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## OCEAN MIND / OCEAN STORIES

### MINDING ANIMALS

For more than thirty years I have been a thinker with things and in particular things in the form of animals. Often life size, often canine, these animals are usually flame cut from solid steel plate. As substantial steel silhouettes they stood on common ground, that is on equal footing with the spectator. As subjects they became mute objects in a kind of shape shifting triggered by the moving viewer. Conversely when they move in reverse ie. object to subject they momentarily quicken in the imagination. There is a pre-linguistic quality to this quickening. In his book Thinking Animals Paul Shepard describes this quickening as part of the evolutionary process that made us human. His thesis, one that I have taken up, is the continuing relevance of that process and our ongoing mental need for animals.

### STARS - EARTHS CORRELATIVE SPACE

As part of heavenly space stars are the most abstract components of nature that we experience. I began to use stars as ideograms in 1991 with the manufacture of 10,000 classic 5 pointed stars, (4" wide), stamped from a continuous coil of 1/8" thick steel. My goal was to imagine the idea of surplus or inexhaustible 'wealth'. This goal soon gave way to a series of 'telescopes' or instruments constructed from the steel ribbon from which the stars had been stamped from. In this negative format the star becomes like a ghost or trace, (something both present and absent), questioning our rootedness and linking that question to the perfect aerial perspective. In time this desire to be above it all slowly gave way and my focus returned to the unruly and irregular nature of our common ground.

### STARS - CONTAINERS AND CRABS

The real wealth of stars is their ubiquitous use in creating an imaginative space that links the infinite and the individual. In that context I began to construct star vessels from laser cut steel stars. Randomly placed each individual star is held, suspended in a porous envelope both tentative and tough. As though shaped with an invisible hand these 'ideal' stars form a stand in for the imagining body. This container, nevertheless seems always posed to disperse. Growing larger in scale, various individual stars twist and break away shedding their universality in an animated scabble for a new home.

### OCEAN STORIES / OCEAN MIND

In Haroun and the Sea of Stories, Salman Rushdie describes the ongoing relevance of water as a library for the future, one which holds its stories in a fluid form. The exhibition Ocean Stories / Ocean Mind questions whether the hidden ecological crisis of ocean dead zones is equally a crisis for the imagination. In a context where sound trumps the visual, the question is whether out of sight is out of mind. As a consequence my exploration begins with an examination of sub marine vehicles. In this exploration stars become sparks of intelligence and we meet both the real and the chimerical.



(Left)  
**Albacore** - 2007  
laser cut steel  
110" w x 21" h

(Top)  
**Rocket** - 2008  
laser cut steel and  
steel cylinder  
54" w x 40" h

(Bottom)  
**The History of Neutral  
Buoyancy** - 2009  
laser cut steel, bronze  
and steel cylinder  
15" w x 43" h

(Right)  
**City of Lights** - 2009  
laser cut steel, steel  
cylinders and stone  
40" w x 76" h



## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

### John McEwen

A graduate of the Ontario College of Art, John McEwen was one of the founding members of the Toronto artist run centre, A Space. In 1972, McEwen left the burgeoning Toronto art scene for a blacksmith shop in the small town of Hillsdale. Working out of his blacksmith shop, McEwen continued to exhibit regularly and by the early 1980s had begun to garner significant attention in Canada and abroad. During the 1980s McEwen exhibited extensively across Canada and in Australia, Germany, and England.

His first major public commission Western Channel was completed for the University of Lethbridge in 1981. In 1984 he was commissioned to do the Royal Canadian Air Force Hall of Tribute located in the National Aviation Museum in Ottawa. Victory / Peace was commissioned by the Toronto's World War II, 50th anniversary committee in 1995. Searchlight, Starlight, Spotlight, was installed in front of the Air Canada Centre, Toronto in 1999 and in October 2001, McEwen was selected to create The Gift from Canada to Australia in recognition of Australia's 100th anniversary. During 2002, McEwen installed two major sculpture commissions, one in Calgary, Weaving Fence and Horn and the other in Toronto for the Cineplex Odeon, Between Heaven and Earth. Two works each featuring a twenty foot engraved cast bronze canoe were installed in 2005 and 2006 respectively. The first entitled River as Thread/Canoe as Needle was installed in the open passage of the new Canadian Embassy in Berlin, Germany. While the second Canoe & Caliper was in Toronto in 2006.

He has continued to alternate his public work with a solo exhibition practice and since 1999 has produced an exhibition on every other calendar year. For two and a half years he worked in partnership with Marlene Hilton Moore on the Valiants Memorial which was unveiled in Ottawa on November the 5th by the Governor General of Canada, Michaëlle Jean. In 2007 he received a Doctor of Fine Arts from the University of Lethbridge.