

Sculpting a vision for the future

BY VICKI SHEARER
Special to the Mercury

A new body of work is being "carved out" – literally – by a Fine Arts instructor at the University of Guelph – Prof. Stephen Schofield,

Schofield is a sculptor with a twist: his choice of materials parallels the way society has changed around him. Eight of his sculptures – which he describes as "about the body" – are on display now at the National Art Gallery in Ottawa. "We tend to think about the body as being armoured or indestructible," says Schofield.

"Part of the shift in society is to show a vulnerable side of the body." Schofield says his art differs from traditional figurative sculpture that was based on the work of the sixteenth century and Renaissance period. Back then, the body was measured and constructed accord-



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ing to conventional perceptions of men, women, and their environment. As is apparent in Schofield's sculptures, there has been a movement away from heavy materials such as bronze and marble. Schofield feels we have always valorized the solid, the massive, and the por-

trayal of the male body. And it was the deconstruction of this ideology that led Schofield to seek more malleable materials such as silk and taffeta.

These materials accurately mimic the characteristics of human skin -- its porosity, strength, and vulnerability. They allow Schofield to express an intriguing new image of the human body, especially when portraying the male body.

Schofield looks at people from both a whole body level and cellular level. To this end, he portrays whole bodies, or just its segments. He also makes clear reference to clothing in his sculpting. By making unidentifiable materials look vulnerable, he enforces the concept of human vulnerability. Schofield enjoys the challenge of making strong materials look weak ... and weak materials strong. He's proving that a subject's

strength does not have to be based on the weight and mass of a material.

Schofield says there are many uses for three-dimensional skills, like packaging, clothing, and computer imaging. He thinks it's essential that students understand how negative space works. Once they understand these concepts, they can develop explorative skills that are a pivotal point to creative endeavours, and are essential for a career in Fine Art, or possibly commercial industry.

"We live in a packaged society but few of us have three-dimensional skills," he says. "We are more adept at two dimensionality; not many of us can gauge the strength of steel, leather or concrete."

SPARKplugs articles appear every Thursday. They are produced by student writers in the Office of Research, University of Guelph.



Stitching Sculpture - Stephen Schofield sews materials into sculptures portraying the strength and vulnerability of the human body.

Photo courtesy Stephen Schofield