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'Impossible' sculpture ready for riverfront debut

BY JACKIE LUPO

DOBBS FERRY — A brisk wind whipped across the Hudson last Friday, Dec. 12, as a curious construction project was under way behind 145 Palisade Street in Dobbs Ferry. A massive aluminum sculpture by Hastings artist and architect Bill Logan was being assembled with the help of a large crane and a friend, fellow sculptor Malcolm MacDougall III.

Outside the waterfront hangar that serves as MacDougall's studio, the heavy lifting was a trial assembly of Logan's abstract "Arc," a rectangular tower about 15 feet high supporting a semi-circular arch by means of a chain strung between both ends of the arch. In about a week, the sculpture would be disassembled and moved to its permanent home at the City of Peekskill's newly opened riverfront park.

If the sculpture came together and behaved as expected during the test run, all would be well.

While MacDougall's father operated the controls of the crane, the younger MacDougall climbed up a ladder and gingerly tried to direct a link of the chain onto the top of a slim prong emerging from the tower. Down on the ground, Logan pointed this way and that, calling out directions while the arch swung precariously from the crane. Finally, the chain was in place and the crane was manipulated to release the arch. But the arch, rather than simply flipping over, remained, amazingly, upright.

"It's alive!" pronounced Logan, 68, as the arch began to rotate on the axis of that narrow prong, attached by a single link of chain. "If you want to know the way the winds blow, this will tell you."

"It's definitely going to move in the wind," agreed MacDougall, 24, climbing down off his perch. The arch kept moving, as was Logan's intention. "All right," he said. "Let's see what it wants to do!"

It did a lot. It spun, in a slow, stately motion. It rocked a little, but always recovered.

"The ends act as ballast," Logan explained, as he took the arch on a walk around the tower, via a dangling piece of rope. "It's self-righting, analogous to the ballast and keel of a sailboat. The center of gravity of the whole system is about a foot and a half below where the chain connects to the arch."

As Logan caused the arch to rotate, the sun came out and lit up the abraded aluminum surface of the arch and tower, which reflected the pink clouds skittering above the Palisades. "This is great!" Logan declared. "We have good light!" City officials were due to arrive any minute from Peekskill to inspect the assembled sculpture and discuss the method for re-installing it at its permanent home. "Arc," as if conscious that it would be observed closely, was putting on its best show.

Fifty-five artists submitted proposals for the new Peekskill park sculpture competition; four were chosen. Logan, perhaps, was at a bit of an advantage, as the longtime Rivertowns resident can readily envision the Hudson as the background for his work. He also harbored no illusions about what the weather could be like down by the river. He noted that the sculpture is greatly "over-designed": it can withstand a wind speed of 100 mph, while the chain that secures the arch to the tower has a safe working load of 23,000 pounds, although the actual force put on the chain is only about one-10th of that.

"The chain was oversized to have a visual presence proportional to the visual scale of the structure," Logan explained.

Logan's work can also be glimpsed on the property of his Hastings home, a former funeral home located on Broadway at Baker Lane. There are other pieces installed in High Ridge Park in Stamford, Conn., and several more are in Old Chatham, N.Y.

Many of Logan's sculptures have an aura of impossibility about them: massive geometric solids that appear to be suspended in midair, attached by only a tiny point to a corner of a neighboring piece. Inside, though, they're meticulously engineered with armatures to withstand physical forces, and complicated balance systems.



TIM LAMORTE/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE
Bill Logan (right) holds a rope attached to the sculpture as Malcolm MacDougall III stands on a crane.

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Logan's ability to create sculptures that apparently defy the laws of physics speaks to his knowledge of those laws. Professionally, he is senior principal and director of design consulting at Vidaris, an architectural firm in Manhattan. Logan earned a master's in architecture from Harvard after graduating with a bachelor's degree in the same subject from Princeton, and he has spent his career as an expert on the materials, forces, and fabrication and testing technologies necessary to turn a designer's dream into something that not only will be buildable, but that will endure. He has served as the primary "curtain-wall consultant" for the Twin Towers of the Kuala Lumpur City Center in Malaysia, the International Finance Center of Hong Kong, and many other structures that are considered among the most complex in the world. He has worked with some of today's foremost architects, including Renzo Piano, César Pelli, Norman Foster, and Bernard Tschumi.

Logan and his wife, Holly Daly, a client-relations manager at a large real estate investment trust data firm in Manhattan, have lived in Hastings for 28 years. Their daughter, Zoe, graduated from Hastings High School in 2000 and their son, Jack, in 2003.

Logan holds several patents in building systems, furniture design (several of his pieces were sold by Knoll International) and sailboat technology. He is an experienced sailor himself, and he has designed boats for others that have crossed the Atlantic. For "Arc," he drew upon all that knowledge.

Whatever the Hudson dishes out, "Arc" will be ready.

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