

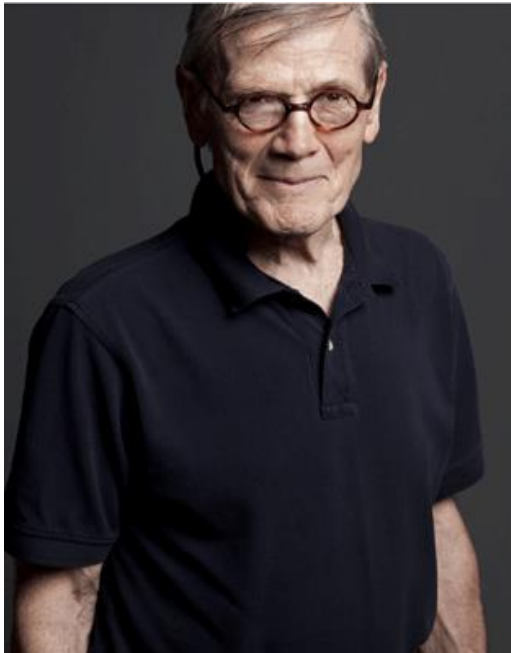
# In the Foundry with Dick Polich: Metal Seer

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Tallix in Beacon, 1988, Courtesy Dick Polich

What do Frank Stella, Janine Antoni, Roy Lichtenstein, Jeff Koons, Martin Puryear, and Joel Shapiro have in common? The Polich Tallix Foundry. Dick Polich, both an early pioneer and present leader in fabricating sculpture, is the focus of an exhibition at the Dorsky Museum in New Paltz that highlights his foundry's fifty-year history and its range of artists and processes.



Dick Polich. Photo by Michael Rudin

Dick Polich's first foundry, Soltek (a gloss on solidification technology) began in partnership with an MIT colleague Sandy Saunders in Cold Spring, New York in the late 1960s. Following early successes with artists including Joel Shapiro, whose cubes from six types of metal grace this exhibition, Polich moved the foundry to a 3000 square foot facility in Peekskill, New York and called the new firm Tallix. The name Tallix alludes to "metallics" — using an X to mark its territory. Here Polich invented better techniques for metal casting, including an "anti-gravity" process called vacuum casting that drew molten metal up into a mold instead of metal being poured down into the mold.

The foundry has variously been called Tallix, Polich, and, now, Polich Tallix throughout its action-packed history. Many buildings and decades later, the 100,000 square-foot foundry is in Rock Tavern, New York, and Dick Polich is celebrating fifty years of working closely with his staff and with over 500 artists. Polich was ahead of everyone in wanting to advance and combine the fields of technology and metallurgy, and today he is known for his versatility in developing a range of materials and processes tailored to suit each artist. Among the many challenges he has faced, he helped Nancy Graves figure out how to cast directly from objects instead of going through the lost wax process. Rona Pondick's stainless steel *Cat* sculpture, 2003-2005, combines digital and cast processes: her hand, digitally scanned and scaled three times larger, connects with a catlike cast form. Frank Stella's silver model for a bandshell in Miami was inspired by digital renderings of smoke rings. Stella, whose studio is next door to the foundry, has been wildly creative in his art-making experiments.

The exhibition is divided into three sections. The first part introduces the earliest works, including a Roy Lichtenstein art table that began as a drawing, was made into a model, and then cast. The range of work over the history of the foundry includes a metal bird by Isamu Noguchi and Martin Puryear's ductile iron model for a 2014 Brown University slavery memorial, which is currently being fabricated. Even though the foundry is known for its large to monumental work, the exhibition is mostly human-sized to smaller pieces. A photograph of all of the foundry workers hanging out on an incredibly tall multi-level Louise Bourgeois fountain illustrates the workers' collective joy in creating the huge specimen. The 54-page exhibition catalog, with essays by Dick Polich and by curator Daniel Belasco, further amplifies the interactions of Polich with various artists and with his foundry team.



Vanessa Hoheb molding an element of Peter de Camp Haines' *Hand* at Tallix, 1988, Courtesy Dick Polich

The second part is a wide screen video, "Heat of Fusion" by Stephen Spaccarelli, which takes us inside the foundry in close-up and panorama views. It features interviews with artists, friends, and family and depicts Dick Polich's roles in building Polich Tallix into a preeminent foundry. In addition to comments from staff Tom Joyce, Vanesa Hoheb, and from artist Toni Putnam, who guided the aesthetics of the foundry in its early years, the faces of the foundry workers – their passion, their diversity, and their commitment as craftspersons – is quite moving.

The third part goes into various foundry processes and includes Tom Otterness models and sketches of the main steps in the lost wax process, along with some foundry pieces showing processes and materials. This is a good start in introducing the range of sculpture the foundry has cast – and in emphasizing the engineering, aesthetic, and process roles that craftspersons play. The exhibition, film, and one wall label suggest there is a range of involvement on the part of each artist – from intense participation to none at all:

In the mid 1980s, Jeff Koons brought souvenirs and figurines to Tallix to be cast in stainless steel for a series of sculptures satirizing luxury goods. Koons performed little manual work on *Cape Codder Troll*, claiming the intensive craft of the foundry's translation of the sculpture from plaster to metal to be his conceptual art. (wall label, Dorsky Museum)

Given its present size and its fifty year history, there is much more than the exhibition permits.

Let's give Dick Polich the last words. I asked: Did you keep records, notes, or other materials for all projects? What are some of the most exciting developments in metal today?

Dick Polich: The simple is answer, "NO". But...we have a lot of records and were

able to call on others, particularly past employees and artists, who kept their own records. I also remind you that one of my jobs was as a member of Directed Staff Research at MIT...and technological research and development required the keeping of detailed notes on everything that was done. So, for example, one of the things I did early on was to hire a photographer named Ted Schweg to come to the foundry one day a month. He could pick whatever day he wanted, no notice was necessary, and photograph and record whatever was going and whoever was there on that specific day.

And once Polich Tallix got going in the mid-70s and the news spread about what we were doing and how we were doing it, our growth was explosive. By 1988, we had grown to 188 people working in 130,000 square feet of shop space. A lot of people got to know us and used us, and often recorded what we were doing.



Lee Furbush of Sunshine, 1972, Courtesy Dick Polich

Tallix staff holding sections of Sterett-Gittings Kelsey's Barbara

As to what's most exciting and promising currently for anyone making objects in metal, the obvious answer is found in what's going on in digital processing. It has become almost standard procedure to digitize work before we cast or fabricate it, that is, unless it's been sculpted on a computer and instead of a model or a drawing, we receive a digital file.

We have two 3-D printing devices in house that we used to make three-dimensional copies of artworks. For the really big stuff, 10 to 30 feet, we can get patterns built that are used directly for lost wax castings or sand casting. On one recent project, we went directly from a scan to 3D printed sand molds that we cast ductile iron into.

The development and adoption of traditional manufacturing processes to digital applications is moving so fast that I can sometimes imagine there being one incredible device that can make anything. That sounds far-fetched, but it is already happening when a company like General Motors and Polich Tallix are both using the same equipment.

Are we worried that General Motors might decide to make sculpture? Not really. It takes a few months for a digital engineer to master a new device. It takes five to ten years to develop a master craftsman who can put together the most complex sculpture and make it look like art...and not something made by a machine. So, we're not too worried about competition from industrial manufacturers, but we sure are keeping our eye on the ball.

Websites for more information: [www.newpaltz.edu/museum](http://www.newpaltz.edu/museum), [www.polichtallix.com](http://www.polichtallix.com), <http://www.newpaltz.edu/museum/exhibitions/current.html>, <http://www.npr.org/2014/10/04/353679029/the-man-who-casts-the-metal-for-the-master-sculptors>

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Rona Pondick, *Cat*, 2002–5, Stainless steel, Edition of 3, AP, 4 ½ x 33 x 14 1/8 in., Courtesy Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris/Salzburg; Sonnabend Gallery, New York; and the artist