

During the process of assembling this exhibition "Mirror to the Mountains" it became obvious that there are universal themes that resonates through John Van Alstine's work. His pieces express a sensibility that could be best likened to a sort of visual haiku. They are distilled from the elements of nature: weight, line, texture and color. With these elements as a framework, he then gives meaning by imbuing the forms with associations from his own experiences. The resulting balance is a sublime expression of the relationship between humankind and nature.

The mountains, in one way or another, have always had an impact on Van Alstine's work. It is fitting that it be exhibited here in the foothills of the Adirondacks precisely because it is this environment which provides a major source of inspiration. Born and raised in Johnstown, Van Alstine spent much of his childhood within the "blue line" and speaks of his impressions of things like the massive stone walls threading through the forest or dramatic granite outcroppings and overhangs. Early in his career he found himself in the stark landscape of Wyoming where the mountains and high plains of the American west had an profound influence. Because of his keen interest in stone, the west, where the land is worn bare exposing the "bones of the earth", provided an impressive and dramatic change from the lush and heavily vegetated environment of childhood. This contrast heightened and focused his appreciation of the physical structure and geology of the land and was soon incorporated into the content of much of his work. These influences continue to this day.

Living and working now in the Adirondacks, the mountains continue to provide perhaps the single most important source for his current work. The physical characteristics of this landscape such as evidence of past glacial activity or fast moving streams and rivers feed in the spring by the melting mountain snowpack, still inform and impact the work. There are however additional aspects of the mountain environment such as the local history and culture that have begun to enter the creative mix. Things like the design and function of the indigenous Adirondack guide boat, sleds, snowplows or agricultural tools from the area play an important role. Hunting and taxidermy which produce the ever present "mounts" or trophy heads (in a way a local form of sculpture) also exert their influence on some of the new work and are evidenced here in the gallery.

We are pleased to present the first solo exhibition in our area of this native son in conjunction with the recently released book on Van Alstine's work, *Bones of the Earth, Spirit of the Land*. This show is indeed a "mirror" reflecting and revealing some of the intricacies and subtleties of our mountain environment. My thanks to John and all others who helped make this exhibition in the Perrella Gallery possible.

Joel Chapin
Gallery Director

