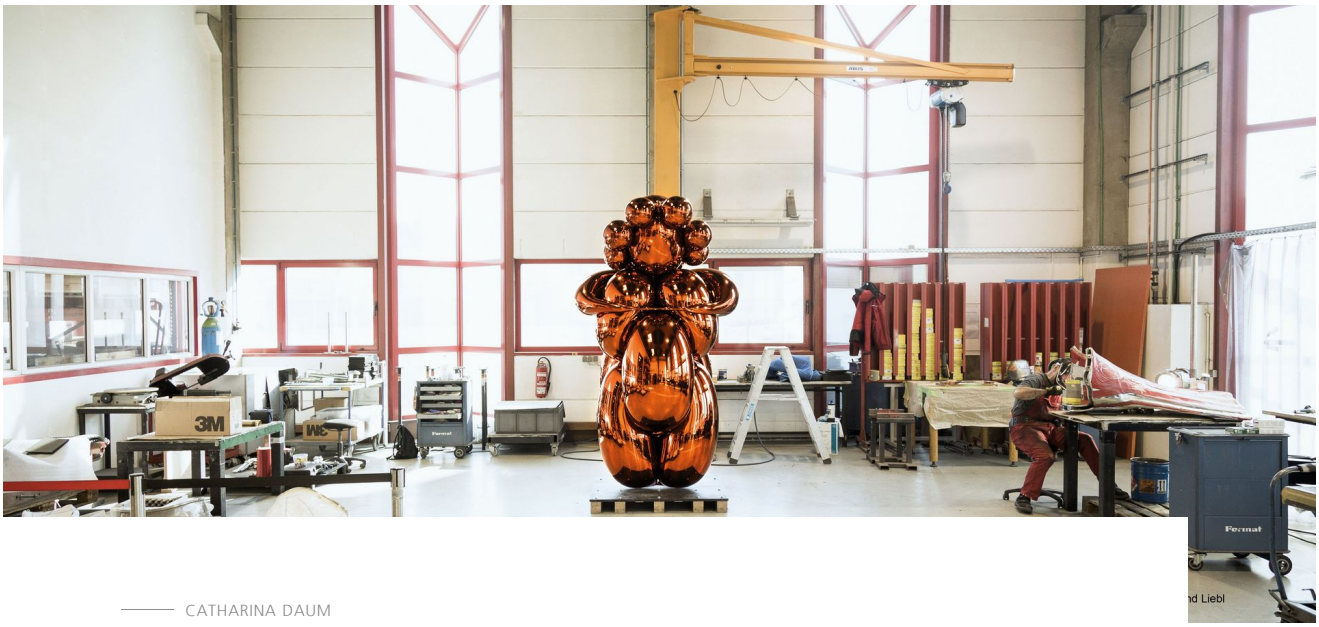
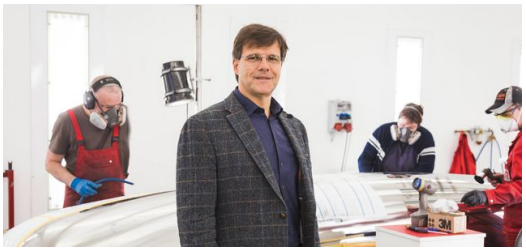


CATHARINA DAUM

“If it’s easy, then others can do it”

In his shop, Uwe Arnold fabricates complex metal sculptures drafted by internationally famed artists, applying the same passion and creativity as he does with housings for industrial customers. These are two areas of expertise that — as he notes — complement each other perfectly.



Uwe Arnold finds great satisfaction in devising solutions to apparently impossible assignments. Picture: Bernd Liebl

Mr. Arnold, your company made a name for itself by crafting objects designed by renowned artists. How did that come about?

Ever since the company was founded, exactly 90 years ago, it has specialized in solving tasks that require high-quality metalwork. At the beginning of the 1960s, we started turning artists’ designs into reality. One strength of Germany’s mid-market sector is its ability to concentrate on market niches and to achieve successful development there. In our case, it was the world of art. Word of our expertise got around quickly. Today we work with internationally famed artists including Jeff Koons, Kazuo Katase and Claus Bury. Artworks account for a 30 percent share of our overall revenue.

What do you see as the differences between cooperation with artists and the work you do for industrial customers?

As far as the practical execution of the order, there’s actually no difference. Face-to-face dialog with all our clients is important, letting us achieve the best possible solution to a task. A part of our philosophy is that we never submit offers anonymously. We want to interact with our clients and to understand exactly what they want. Here it is important to be a better listener than our competitors.

And it makes no difference whether we are working with a sculptor, an architect or an industrial customer. We take an

unbiased approach to every task and work to achieve tailor-made solutions. The more difficult the assignment is, the more exciting we find it. Even my grandfather said, "Impossible isn't a part of our vocabulary!" Our motto today is simply: "If it's easy, then others can do it." Finding solutions where others have declared the task to be insurmountable — that is our special strength.

"The more difficult the assignment is, the more exciting we find it"

What is the special attraction of working with artists?

An artist usually aspires to create something for eternity. This aligns with our efforts to achieve excellent quality and durability. Neither of us can think and create in terms of "cheap". That unifies us in spirit. An exciting factor is that — as an artworks contractor — we cooperate with people from various heritages and histories. As German engineers, we first had to learn not to rely solely on our technical knowledge. We also have to grasp the many different character traits and the artists' aspirations. That is sometimes more difficult than finding the right technical solution for a task.

What is the normal course of an art project?

Usually the artists arrive with an idea, with drawings, sketches or a model. They are seldom proficient in metalworking and, therefore, have not yet decided on a particular material. Our first function is thus as an advisor or consultant. We attempt to comprehend what the artist wants to achieve — the surface texture, the color and certain details. Based on that, we prepare a feasibility study where we point out difficulties that might appear. Then we submit suggestions for implementation and can put forward firm prices and schedules.

That sounds very much like normal interaction with an industrial customer.

That's true. We attempt to apply our expertise in project management in the world of the arts. There, the focus is on the idea; practical considerations like deadlines and prices are secondary. The objective of preliminary discussions is to determine where we might encounter difficulties in execution and to attach a price tag to them. If we misjudge a particular situation, then that's our problem.

When you spend so much time and energy on exciting fields such as the arts and architecture, isn't it difficult to get excited about manufacturing casings and processing sheet metal?

Not in the least! That is and remains our core business and we devote the same energy and creativity to it as to our projects in the arts and architecture. Essentially, all these types of business profit from each other. We use project management to impose order on artistic endeavors. On the other hand, that indispensable willingness to experiment — needed for complex sculptures — and our readiness to follow the "trial-and-error" principle both help us when implementing requests by our industrial customers. When we have perfected distortion-free, high-gloss polishing of stainless steel for an artwork, this expertise can also be transferred to other commissions. Our experience with industry — using the TRUMPF TruLaser 3030 for cutting, to name one example — is essential to executing the precision work needed by art and architecture.

When a sculpture leaves your shop, it must give you a very special feeling — the thought that you have created something beautiful.

But of course! When the artist approves the objects we have created in our shop, he also offers a word of thanks to the staff involved. This personal recognition for their work is something they otherwise experience only very rarely. And I get goosebumps every time an artist sees his idea brought to fruition and — with a quiet "Wow!" — expresses his excitement. But actually, every customer who is satisfied with our work is a source of pride.

This dolphin will not be found in the water, but rather in a museum. Picture: Bernd Liebl

When producing sculptures, this job shop approaches the boundaries of the technically feasible. Picture: Bernd Liebl

 Arnold takes the expertise gained in job shop operations and applies it to the art world. Picture: Bernd Liebl

WHO

Arnold AG in Friedrichsdorf, Hesse, and Steinbach-Hallenberg, Thuringia. Founded in 1924, 350 employees. <link http://www.arnold.de>www.arnold.de</link>

WHAT

Complex component assemblies with special needs in terms of workmanship, engineering and logistics. Demanding elements for design and architecture projects, and implementing drafts by international artists.

HOW

TruLaser 3030, 2 x TruMatic 6000, TruTool TKF 1500, Stopa storage system

CATHARINA DAUM
TRUMPF MEDIA RELATIONS, ЛИЦЕ ЗА ВРЪЗКА С МЕДИИТЕ