

Solomon, Tessa. "Alain Kirili, Sculptor Who Lent Warmth to Industrial Materials, Has Died at 74," *ARTnews*, 21 May 2021.

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Alain Kirili at his solo show at Susan Inglett Gallery in 2019.  
PHOTO ADAM REICH, NYC/COURTESY SUSAN INGLETT GALLERY

Alain Kirili, a French American abstract sculptor who imbued metal forms with warmth and tactility, has died at 74. His longtime representative, New York's Susan Inglett Gallery, confirmed the news, writing, "We will always remember Alain for his friendship, unfettered love for life, and, naturally, for his great contributions to art—he left a legacy that will continue to inspire."

Though always quick to acknowledge his debt to sculptors such as David Smith and Alberto Giacometti, Kirili diverged from their styles. He employed traditional blacksmithing techniques to create his lauded forged-iron sculptures. This afforded his work a measure of spontaneity: he urgently hammered the hot, malleable iron, and it preserved the rhythm of his gestures.

Kirili tried to evoke the human body in his sculptures, which read as sensual, spiritual, and fluid. In *Messenger* (Messenger), 1976, one of his earliest forged iron pieces, a straight iron bar rises from a bronze base. In some other works, thin, interlocking wires wind upward. "Anything that is too much on the ground depresses me," Kirili told the *Brooklyn Rail* in 2012. "I need verticality; it's part of my means of survival, of my dignity even."

Kirili was born in 1946 in Paris. There, at the Musée Rodin, he encountered David Smith's *Cubi XVIII* and *Cubi XIX*. He was struck by their industrial materials and their allusions to nature. At 19, he left for New York. "I thought that if a country could give such a thing as *Cubi* to the world I should probably go to that country; I felt they were the most important sculptures I had ever seen in modern art," he said in the *Brooklyn Rail* interview.

He traveled widely in America, visiting most major museums along the East Coast and throughout the Midwest. Upon returning to Paris, he fell in with an avant-garde group of writers, artists, and intellectuals, most of whom were championing the deconstruction of art.

"I was interested in this idea of deconstruction, but suddenly I felt I could not survive if I did not have tactility," he told the *Brooklyn Rail*. "I needed incarnation. I discovered that conceptual art was actually a puritanical approach. The de-materialization of art was too prudish for me."

His first solo show was at Sonnabend Gallery in Paris in 1972. His sculptures debuted in New York in 1976 at the inaugural show of the Institute for Art and Urban Resources (now MoMA PS1).

In 1977, the same year he married the French photographer Ariane Lopez-Huici, Kirili exhibited in Documenta VI. By then, he had permanently settled in New York, absorbing its

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distinct art forms. He began experimenting with aluminum, leading to his discovery that, when exposed to a flame, the metal exploded in what he called an "expressionistic and emotional" manner.

In 1986, he debuted his first public work, the large-scale abstract sculpture *Grand commandement blanc*, at the Tuileries in Paris. In 1992, he unveiled the first work in his "Résistance" series of monumental limestone sculptures, each of them composed of 14 blocks weighing around 30 tons each. He described the series as a "singular sculptural alphabet."

"Commandement" (1980-) was one of his longest and most important bodies of work. Inspired by a visit to New York's Jewish Museum, he started sculpting a series of 15- to 35-inch-high geometric forms referencing the calligraphy traditionally used to transcribe the Torah. He employed a variety of material for the figures, including painted iron, styrofoam, and concrete.

"There is an old mystery, for which I can provide no explanation, about why there is pattern of circumvolution in art and religion; it's something that seems to occur naturally in humanity," Kirili said. "There is circumvolution with the Torah in the synagogue: inside the synagogue they turn with the Torah so that everyone kisses [it]. Circumvolution, verticality are fundamental drives in each human—and in my art, too."