

bright lights, small footprint

artist Tom Joyce's solar-powered ambitions

"Now more than ever we've got a collective responsibility to make a change," says blacksmith/sculptor Tom Joyce from his barnlike, 2,200-square-foot adobe studio near Santa Fe. "We've simply got to do it" The 52-year-old artist and 2003 MacArthur Fellow is showing me a computer image of an imagined park path lined with streetlamps that resemble Jetsonian trees—a canopy of whimsical, 20-foot-tall, solar-powered pole lamps with three "petals," each of which contains a high-powered solar cell positioned beneath a clear, impact-resistant acrylic lens. Crafted from high-quality stone, aluminum, bronze, and iron, this series of functional sculpture may seem like a departure for Joyce—who's better known, in museums from Moscow to Mexico, for his award-winning contemporary forged-iron pieces. But the lamps are a natural next step in the self-taught artist's evolution as a toolmaker.

Why Joyce made the leap from creating iron bowls inspired by Fibonacci mathematical sequences to designing solar-powered landscape lights has a lot to do with the following statistic: 22 percent of all electrical power generated in the world is used for lighting. A quarter of that power is used for exterior lighting, which costs \$3.2 billion per year in the U.S. alone. "We all see that we have a problem and in some ways we're all implicated," says Joyce. "As the creator of functional objects, I have a unique opportunity to express a new realm, to showcase solar technology in a more aesthetically compelling way. This is about toolmakers' problem solving."

The opportunity came in April 2008, when Bay Area entrepreneurs Farzad and Rhonda Dibachi, co-founders of Niku Corporation (a software-development company that was acquired by Computer Associates International in 2005 for \$350 million), tapped Joyce's creative talents for Qnuru. The group's collaborators derived the name Qnuru, pronounced ka'-noo'-roo', from the Swahili word for "light." Then they added "Q," a notation scientists use for light's radiant energy. The goal of the Albuquerque and Santa Fe-based company is to set a new standard for the look, function, and quality of light produced through photovoltaic technology.

In keeping with its goals of sustainability, local growth, and design excellence, Qnuru debuted its line of six Joyce-designed solar lights at James Kelly Contemporary in mid-May. The next show, at San Francisco's

Braunstein/Quay Gallery in late August, will coincide with the company's pilot project, an installation of Qnuru lights in Golden Gate Park, done in collaboration with San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom's Green Desk initiative and the city's departments of Cultural Affairs and Economic Development.

Joyce's ultimate goal is to install the lights worldwide, which is why, this January, he hired Santa Fe metalsmith, jewelry designer, and former AT&T executive Kristin Lora Steinmetz as the company's executive vice president of global sales and marketing. "We're focusing anywhere there are alternative-technology initiatives," says Steinmetz. "The acceptance of this technology is more widely spread in places like Dubai, where the existing grid and lighting industry are not nearly as large or saturated as in the U.S."

The reach may be global, but Joyce and Steinmetz plan to keep research, design, and production as local as possible. As soon as the company has firm footing, it will implement "open source design," bringing in artists-in-residence and sharing the company's technology, then licensing the artists' future ideas through Qnuru. "Right now the loss of jobs is so intense that any part we can play in terms of economic health is key," says Joyce. "But we have our sights set on major projections. We want this company to have a tremendous impact"—SP

Tom Joyce: *Qnuru*, through Jun 14, James Kelly Contemporary Art, 1601 Paseo de Peralta, 505-989-1601, jameskelly.com



ALL COURTESY QNURU



Clockwise from top: Qnuru's *Aquila*, *Cumuli*, and *Talus* solar-powered lamp designs; Tom Joyce at work in his studio.