A Brush with Gold

At first glance the objects appear crafted by ancient artisans; the detail is exquisite. But these “intimate sculptures” of gold, space-age steel, precious gems and 40-million-year-old mammoth ivory, ranging in size from one to seven inches, are the designs of 95-year-old Daniel Brush. For the past 20 years he has worked in virtual seclusion in a New York City loft-studio he shares with his wife, Oliva, and son, Silli. There he creates miniature masterpieces, each taking up to 1,000 hours to complete.

Before Brush retreated to New York, he was a painter and an art professor at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. But he had long admired the goldwork of the Etruscans and was fascinated by their techniques. Brush became obsessed with the mysteries of gold and with perfecting his own skills. He revived other techniques—ornamental turnery using 10th-century lathes and steel carving done with chisels. Brush learned about his materials by visiting Pittsburgh steel mills, and about mathematical accuracy by working as a master toolmaker. His sculptures are imbued with his passion for Oriental philosophy, and he attributes his concentration and patience to its discipline.


—Marlene A. Lidell
Daniel Brush is drawn to the mind and spirit of ancient gold masters. He reworks each object hundreds of times. To fabricate the dove for Justinian (page 95), he hammered the gold to a thickness of 0.002 inch and covered it with handmade gold granules (each 0.008-0.018 inch in diameter). He used a two-handled sable brush to place each of the 50,000 granules to finish the piece. When Brush chisels steel, he wears goggles, welder's boots and leather chips, gauntlets, apron to protect his body. "Nonetheless, every day that I carve, my hands and chest are covered with steel splinters and blood," says Brush. "The splinters are so fine that they can only be found when the rust appears under the skin."

**GOLD GROWTH. 1991-93 (top view)**
Pure gold, steel

**ORB. 1992-95**
Pure gold, steel

**SCHOLAR'S TABLE PIECE. 1994**
Pure gold, steel

**LEANING BOUQUET. 1997-92 (underside)**
Pure gold, steel

**DOVE PULIBUL. 1973 (detail)**
22-karat gold