

BILL MACK

The Wizard of Art Hollywood Sculptor.

Lucinda Bunn

BILL MACK CUTS A pretty extraordinary figure, both in his appearance and his work. He enjoys one of the most successful and high profile careers in the world of American contemporary art. With his charismatic flair and distinctive personal style, mustachioed Mack has been creating mind-blowing sculptures and paintings for over thirty five years. Perhaps due to his obsession with popular culture and his continued idolism of Hollywood icons, fans of his work include Bill Clinton, Sylvester Stallone, Elton John and the late Elizabeth Taylor. Mack has become somewhat of a celebrity himself. Known for his symbolic trademark of wearing a fresh rose in his lapel, this guy is as eccentric as he is brilliant.

His success must have seemed unlikely, living in Minneapolis as a boy. He painted on weekends for extra money during the school term and only tried sculpting at the age of seventeen. At this point, he was working as a designer for a company that specialised in bronze relief tablets. When a colleague's work fell short, Mack stepped in to pick up the slack. Shortly after, he quit his job and began working as a freelance relief sculptor. What he lacked in formal training, he made up for in experience working with different materials, from cast bronze, to more modern substances such as resins, silicones and acrylics. When he made his transition to the galleries, Mack possessed a great deal of technical knowledge to complement his unique talents.

Mack's big break came with his debut exhibition in New York, and now, nearly four decades later, he has had exhibitions in Tokyo, England, Germany and France. His artwork is sold in four continents and he's often regarded as 'the finest sculptor in the world today'. It's not often that you can say something is truly unique but Mack uses a technique he has developed himself. He creates lightweight framed artwork which encompasses a combination of various levels of relief, with the appearance of being cast in solid bronze. 'Calling my artwork bas-relief is incorrect, since bas-relief refers to low relief sculpture', he says, 'my art has more physical depth than high relief. Technically, sculptures combining various levels of relief and full-round parts are called alto relief sculptures', he explains. Similar techniques were used in ancient Greek and Roman architecture. His signature style has drawn comparisons with 'Romantic Realism', particularly his sculptures of the female form; with their emotional beauty and soulful dignity, inspired

by the pre-Raphaelite paintings of the 19th century. Mack's figures are updated with an athletic physique, a step away from the classic pre-Raphaelite beauties.

Interestingly, Mack is an avid collector himself. He boasts an assortment of classic paintings by Chagall and Picasso, not to mention his love for rare memorabilia. Mack owns costumes from several of his favourite American movies, including the cowardly lion's costume, featured in the 1939 fantasy film, *The Wizard of Oz* and the coat Clark Gable wore in *Gone With The Wind*. Most notably, Mack bought the original Hollywood sign back in 2005. Built in 1923 on Mount Lee, the Hollywood sign, which actually read 'Hollywoodland' unlike its replacement, personified the culture of the American film industry. There is a mysterious nature to its history. Many young actors and actresses would touch the metal letters for good luck but English stage and screen actress Peg Entwistle leapt from the top of the letter 'H', to her death in 1932. The actress was struggling to find her feet in the harsh world of Hollywood. In a cruel twist of irony, a letter to Peg arrived the day after her tragic suicide, offering her the lead role in a play. After buying the sign, Mack has used the metal pieces to create artwork depicting the golden stars of Hollywood; chosen for their success but also for their ill-fated deaths, as Marilyn Monroe and James Dean both make an appearance.

If you are interested in taking a look at Bill Mack's extraordinary artwork, Andy Seger of J & A Fine Art, has a fantastic display at his gallery in Tanworth-in-Arden. J & A Fine Art showcases 30 pieces of Mack's 3D artwork, in a homey atmosphere. It's the best way to view it, as Mack uses warm tones and bronze pieces to create his striking reliefs. Each piece reveals a story that spills out of the frame; with recurring themes of passion, longing and happiness. Mack is an emotional being- that much is clear- but the way the depth of the sculptures reflects the depths of their themes is truly poetic.

Bill Mack's artwork can be viewed exclusively at J & A Fine Art. ■

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