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# Carving Beauty into the Lives of Others

BY CHARLEEN EARLEY PHOTOS COURTESY OF RICHARD MACDONALD

Richard MacDonald loves the human form. So much so, that he's carved a niche for himself in the last 30 years in the art arena as a world-renowned sculptor, whose one-man exhibitions have graced galleries throughout the United States, Europe and the Orient.

His pieces, over 100 of them, which are collected by such people as former U.S. President Bill Clinton and Senator Hillary Clinton, Linda and Stewart Resnick, William Payne, and Leann Rimes, pay tribute to the human figure and human emotions with unrelenting dedication, quality, and integrity.

For many people it takes a lifetime to discover their passions in life, but not so with this 62-year-old, Pasadena-born artist who found his true love in art two weeks after he turned 18. It all began at the nudge of his uncle Charles' Ax, then a leading graphic designer for United Airlines.

"My uncle became my surrogate father and I lived with his family in Hollywood, Florida. Since my brother was killed at age 15, I was 18 and didn't think I'd make it to 21. I was a lost soul for quite a few years and had no interest in anything. He told me, 'you've got two weeks vacation and then you're mine!'" recalled MacDonald. "He enrolled me in the Art Institute of Miami and said 'there's a pad and you can draw, and I'll be teaching here so I can keep my eyes on you!'" In the middle of the room, MacDonald recalls seeing

a nude woman, something he'd never seen before in real life. "I timidly started drawing," he said.

MacDonald soon joined the Coast Guard; a Special Forces branch started by Kennedy, and served his time. "Everybody had to do six years," he said. After serving, he moved to California, attended Art Center, College of Design (typically known as Art Center) in Pasadena, California — one of the leading art and design colleges in the world — and graduated magna cum laude on January 19, 1971.

He credits his uncle for giving him direction in life and being an immense role model.

"It's about who he was and how he handled himself with great integrity. He worked hard and never would allow anything to be done by him that wasn't exceptional — no mediocrity," said MacDonald, who has since been the recipient of many national and international awards for his work in painting, drawing, and sculpting.

Unlike his painting and drawing education, sculpting was something the father of two, Michele (40) and Richard Jr. (38), taught himself, and not on purpose either. "I never found any mentors [with sculpting], and I really struggled because some of those around me were famous, but didn't want to help," said MacDonald. Given the frustration he felt by those who slighted him, MacDonald decided to do a 180 and become a mentor



himself, which he does with great pride and satisfaction.

When pressed to divulge a name of at least one personal mentor besides his uncle, he credits the greats who have sculpted before him in world history. "I studied art history my entire life. I travel extensively, and wherever I go, I visit museums, so those are my mentors. Reading and history have been my mentors," he said.

In addition to mentoring future artists, MacDonald donates his art and time to hundreds of charitable organizations to include Boys and Girls Club of America, Make a Wish Foundation,

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and New York's "Free Arts for Abused Children." In jest, MacDonald said his grown kids love his work, "more than they love me!" He said, they not only admire and own his pieces, but "they constantly ask to have more." His family, he said, is a great deal responsible for his success, and his longtime partner, Julia Cominos, heads up his business development. "She's phenomenal. She handles my partners (50/50 with Cirque du Soleil) and is working with them to develop another gallery at MGM Mirage's new CityCenter in Las Vegas," he said. "It should be completed, we hope, by the end of November, 2009."

During an uncertain and unstable economy, MacDonald finds financial peace in his work through craftsmanship. "When I'm working on a piece, I put energy into it," he said. "Nothing is motivated by money, it's motivated by quality and longevity, and because of that, my business has been up by 35 percent this year."

Beauty, he said, is what his sculptures add not only to his collectors' lives, but to society as well, thanks to his metamorphosis from a disturbed child into a positive-thinker and secure man. "Before, as a child and young adult, I felt very uneasy, very temporary and didn't really have thoughts about being a part of what my role would be in society or to my family," said MacDonald. "But now I feel very comfortable with my family and success, and to change the

lives of people by adding beauty and positive input into their lives. I feel I'm just at the beginning of my life!"

MacDonald's 1996 tour de force piece called, "The Flair," is a 26-foot gymnast caught in the execution of the maneuver, and transpired from a painting he created for the 1984 Olympics. Another masterpiece is his 15-foot, 15-ton sculpture called, "Momentum," created in celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> playing of the U.S. Open golf championship at Pebble Beach.

"Art grounds you," said MacDonald, who takes anywhere from six months to 14 years to complete a piece. "In these bad times, I create artwork that is more beautiful than ever before — acts of beauty — and it makes you think these bad times are temporary, but nature is perfect."

An art collector himself of Picasso and works from California impressionists, one of his favorite pieces he created (purchased by the late Luciano Pavarotti), is a two gold medal-winning piece called, "Butterfly." It's also a piece that ironically mirrors MacDonald's life.

"It's about becoming yourself within your lifetime," said MacDonald. "It's an allegory piece that is not a metamorphosis — you're clumsy about yourself growing up. Pavarotti loved that piece!" ◦