

Poetry in Motion

SCULPTOR RICHARD MACDONALD CASTS A FRESH LIGHT
ON THE GRACEFULNESS OF THE HUMAN FORM.

By Lisa Crawford Watson

“I have dedicated my career to making a difference by creating passionate and emotive works of art that enrich the lives of others. After 25 years, I feel like I’ve just begun.”



Richard MacDonald captures Royal Ballet principal dancer Steven McRae midleap.

With major exhibitions recently held in Hong Kong and Barcelona, figurative sculptor Richard MacDonald boldly opened his own foundry so he could avoid having to wait to cast his sculptures — particularly the larger-than-life-sized pieces. Now, he doesn't have to wait in line.

“I was not interested in owning a foundry,” says MacDonald. “This is not about ego or money or success. I certainly don't need another complication in my life. This required millions of dollars of investment and many more employees. I'm 67 years old. There's something about a legacy that interests me, to have the foundry continue on, for my family, after I pass. But my current objective is to ensure the quality of my own work,” he explains. “I want to believe I have full integrity when I tell people this is the best figurative bronze you can find on the planet.”

The 32,000-square-foot facility — located in Monterey, California — was previously occupied by Richard MacDonald

Studios and required the artist to purchase contiguous land and build a pair of 14,000- and 19,000-square-foot buildings in which to continue his work.

MacDonald's son and daughter-in-law, Richard MacDonald Jr. and Ariane MacDonald, own and opened Dawson Cole Fine Art galleries in Laguna Beach and on El Paseo in Palm Desert. “Our gallery is about more than representing art by Richard MacDonald and other fine artists,” MacDonald Jr. says about the El Paseo location. “It is about bringing the voice of our artists to the Palm Desert community, about using art as a vehicle to make a difference in the community. We recognize the investment we have made in the desert, and we are grateful for the reciprocal support of this community. Art is very important here.”

This year, MacDonald completed a grand monument for the Royal Ballet, based at the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden in London. The monument, delivered to the site this summer, includes four heroic figures.

DAWSON COLE FINE ART

MacDonald has nothing to prove. He already did that when he turned around his troubled youth and was accepted to the Los Angeles Art Center on his second try, achieving a full scholarship to the prestigious school from which his uncle had graduated. The artist commenced with honors.

Six months later, the Miami Dolphins commissioned him to illustrate a book, after which he moved to Atlanta to produce corporate sports illustrations, earning him representation in the NFL and NBA halls of fame and a place in the permanent collection of the National Art Museum of Sport. He also created a four-color painting of Disney characters for Coca-Cola and Disney, featuring the Disney castle with the entire cast of characters. It went into production of some 8 million posters, which proved to his kids that dad really was an artist.

While in Atlanta, MacDonald joined forces with two other young artists to create the Graphic Arts Guild in support of other emerging talent. Within a few years, membership grew to more than 450 artists. Shortly thereafter, they opened the American Illustrators Gallery in a 4,500-square-foot space vacated by Neiman Marcus.

“By 1982, I was 36 years old and the highest-paid illustrator in America,” MacDonald says. “Then I quit — turned the page. I had done enough. It wasn’t

who I was anymore, or what I wanted to be. It was a successful career, but when it’s not enough, it’s not enough.” It was a bridge for the youth least likely to succeed.

Like Michelangelo, who transitioned from Ghirlandaio’s house of painters to the Medici Sculpture Garden, MacDonald’s move from illustration to sculpture seemed as smooth as marble. And it proved he was on the right path.

“Sculpting is one of the world’s oldest professions, which splintered into many directions, effectively destroying its learning system,” MacDonald says. “It was brought back into well-being by Michelangelo during the Renaissance, but again we lost the apprentice, lost our ability to teach, one man to another.

“I am self-taught in the sense that there isn’t anyone to teach us how to be an artist,” he continues. “Don’t we need to know how to draw? Before Michelangelo was ever handed a

chisel, Medici assigned him to a drawing desk, much as my uncle did with me. I am inspired by the struggle of not having formal training, except in drawing.”

MacDonald received his first sculpture commission in 1982, a heroic Christ for a Modern Episcopal church under construction in Atlanta. Although inexperienced in sculpting, he summoned the spirit and creativity to design, sculpt, and ultimately install *Christus Rex*, a figure that floated before stained-glass windows of his design.

“The struggle in making figurative art precious today is that, unlike Rodin and Degas, we have limited editions — they didn’t,” MacDonald says. “I love the classics. I have a need for people to respect figurative art and what it does for humanity.

Yet clearly, if I continued to spend one or two years on a sculpture, it would not be possible to position myself for monumental work.”

Obsessed with the need to convey his own sense of the strength, energy, and passion of humankind, MacDonald launched a “personal exploration of human theater,” creating several series of mimes, dancers, athletes, and his renowned *Architectonica* — each a profound tribute to the joy of the moment and the inherent beauty of the human body.

The inspiration behind *The Flair*, the 26-foot gymnast MacDonald created for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, emerged from a painting of a gymnast for the 1984 Olympics. His

passion was further ignited by his study of gymnasts training at Georgia Tech.

MacDonald has since sculpted other tributes. Among them is *Momentum*, a 15-foot monument installed at the Pebble Beach Golf Links that honored the 100th U.S. Open.

“Figurative art has really taken a hit,” MacDonald says. “I think people believe it’s passé. I haven’t figured out what is passé about trying to connect to another human being. Are you going to walk into the Medici Chapel in Italy, see the *Four Seasons*, and complain about figurative art? You’re going to applaud it.” ✨

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Sculptor Richard MacDonald found inspiration for *The Flair*, a 26-foot bronze he created for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, by watching gymnasts train at Georgia Tech.

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Richard MacDonald’s renowned *Architectonica* serves as a tribute to the joy of the moment and the inherent beauty of the human body.

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