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John Kennedy

Burma, 1931-2004

The sculptor John Kennedy (1931 – 2004) is widely known for his graceful bronze figures, which adorn parks, campuses, and public buildings around the world. Two of his most famous sculptures are Spirit of Audrey, dedicated to Audrey Hepburn and located at the UNICEF Headquarters in New York City, and The Entertainer, the official statuette of the Palm Springs International Film Festival.

Kennedy was born in 1931 in Rangoon, Burma, to a Scottish textile merchant and his Burmese wife. During the war, he was evacuated to northern Burma, traveling by boat along the Irrawaddy River to Mandalay, and then to Moguk, from where many years later, he was to draw inspiration particularly from the tall, elegantly thin Shan people for his distinctive style of sculpture. It was at boarding school in Lucknow, India, where he was first introduced to art.

Kennedy served six years in the British Merchant Navy, followed by a career in journalism. He worked as a photojournalist and opened his own international news and photo agency in Fleet Street, London. He discovered and managed 1950s British pop icon Tommy Steele, who was considered at the time to be the British equivalent of Elvis Presley. In the 1960s, Kennedy created a succession of nightclubs, including London's first discotheque, the Ad Lib Club, and an elite waterfront nightclub called Club Kennedy in Majorca. A driven entrepreneur, he also became known for helping to invent the Micro Cool misting system, now used to cool the outdoor areas of many theme parks, restaurants, and hotels in South West USA and other desert areas.

Throughout his life, Kennedy always held on to his greatest passion: the creation of art. In fact, his artistic approach and gifted vision underpinned his success in his many careers. He often traveled in Europe where he apprenticed with world-class sculptors, learning firsthand how to cast bronzes using the traditional lost-wax method. He was fascinated with the physical process of working in clay. He loved the way in which he was able to communicate the profound depth and range of human emotions through it.

After moving his family to Palm Springs, California in 1980, Kennedy was finally able to immerse himself totally in art. Although he was trained in the classical style of sculpture, he proceeded to create abstract figures –devoid of facial features, yet fully human and saturated with emotion.

Kennedy sought to reveal the intimacy of loving relationships by giving these abstract figures recognizable gestures and poses, such as the caress of a hand or a gentle embrace. He once said of his creative process: "You can tell so much from a figure's body language. Even the tilt of the head shows a particular mood or emotion. In this way, the body is a vehicle for the expression of the spirit."

Kennedy's distinctive style of bronzes have attracted the attention of major collectors, such as Kirk Douglas, Gunter Sachs, Baron Thyssen, and Jim & Jackie Lee Houston, as well as the praise of art critics who noted that Kennedy's engaging figures impel us "to both touch them and be touched by them."

Statement

The interchange between male and female in all its complexity had always interested me as an artist. As an incurable romantic, I seek to capture the warmth and tender closeness, the caring and feeling as well as the joy and often the whimsical side of these very personal human emotions. This is why I use the human body as a "point of departure" simplifying the figure to a lyrical composition.

Resume

Education

La Martiners College, India and Naval College, North Wales, Great Britain

Exhibitions

2018 Coda Gallery, Palm Desert, CA
1999 Coda Gallery, Palm Desert, CA
1998 Diane Nelson Fine Art, Laguna Beach, CA
1996 International Art Multiple, Dusseldorf, Germany
1996 Sonia Low Fine Art Geestaad, Switzerland
1996 Prospect Place Fine Art, La Jolla, CA
1996 Coda Gallery, Palm Desert, CA
1995 Gallerie Les Hirondelles, Geneva, Switzerland
1995 Richard Hagen Fine Art Broadway, England
1994 Oxford County Museum, Oxford, England
1994 Gallerie Hyna, Rottach-Egern, Tegernsee, Germany
1994 Cabazon Cultural Museum, California
1994 Bowers Museum Gallery, Santa Ana, CA
1993 Bruton Street Gallery, London, England
1993 Oxford County Museum, Oxford, England
1993 The La Quinta Arts Foundations Gallery, La Quinta, CA
1993 Valerie Miller Fine Art Gallery, Palm Desert, CA
1992 Prospect Place Fine Art, La Jolla, CA
1992 John Kennedy and Arthur Secunda, the La Quinta Arts Foundations
Gallery 1992 International Sculpture Exhibition, College of the Desert, Palm
Desert, CA 1991 Art LA 91 International Art Fair, Los Angeles, CA
1991 John Kennedy and Ramona Sakiestewa, Sternberg Gallery, Chicago, IL
1991 John Kennedy and Jean Cocteau, Century Gallery, London, England 1990

Commissions

2002 Audrey Hepburn Tribute, UNICEF, Urban Plaza, NY
2000 City Of Belevue
1998 Barbara Sinatra Children's Center, Palm Desert, CA
1998 Kansas Health Foundation, Wichita, KS
1998 City of Brea, Public Arts Program, Laurel Walk Project
1997 City of Brea, Public Arts Program, Arbors Project

1996 Performing Arts Council Awards Trophy, Annenberg Theater, Palm Springs, CA
1996 International Film Festival Palm Springs, Awards Trophy, Palm Springs, CA
1996 Public Library, Palm Desert, CA
1995 City of Palm Springs "Entertainer", Palm Canyon Drive, Palm Springs, CA
1995 Public Park Water Sculpture, City of Rottach-Egern, Germany
1994 Ogden School Children's Playground, Chicago, IL
1994 Gunter Sachs, St Tropez Estate, South France
1994 JFK Medical Plaza, Entrance to Medical Building, Indian Wells, CA
1993 Gunter Sachs, Halston Townhouse, New York, NY
1992 Stauffacher Art Center, Entrance to College Campus, State Fair College, Sedalia, MO
1991 Civic Center, Water Sculpture at Entrance, City of La Quinta, CA
1990 Stamford Public Library, corner of Ferguson Street, Stamford, CT

Public Installations

"Joy of Life" (2021) Lawrence J. Ellison Institute for Transformative Medicine of USC, Los Angeles, CA
"Spirit of Audrey" Tribute to Audrey Hepburn (2002) United Nations Plaza, New York, NY
"Spirit of Compassion" sister piece to #3 (2002) Uni Medical Center, Audrey Hepburn Children's House
"Spirit of Wisdom" (2002), University of Santa Monica, Santa Monica, CA
"Amore" (2000) Public Park, City of Belevue, Belevue, W A
"Sympatico", "Friendship Bench", "Girl Reminiscing", "Iron Bench" (1998) Public Park, City of Brea, CA
"Metamorphosis" (1998) Barbara Sinatra Children's Center, Rancho Mirage, CA
"Life is a Dance of Balance" (1998) Kansas Health Foundation, Wichita, Kansas
"Spirit of Life" (1997) The Arbors (gated community); Brea, CA
"Girl Reminiscing" (1996) Palm Desert Public Library
"Harmony 2" (1995) SunLines Transit Agency, Thousand Palms, CA
"The Dancers" (1995) Public Park, Munich, Germany
"Mother & Child Duet" (1995) Lenkerhof Alpine Resort, Lenk, Switzerland
"The Entertainer" (1995) Palm Canyon Theater, Palm Springs, CA
"Friendship Bench" (1994) Oxford County Museum, Oxford, England
"Spirit of Life" (1994) JFK Medical Plaza, Palm Desert, CA
"Strange Duet" (1994) Gunter Sachs Estate, St. Tropez, France
"Indian Holocaust" (1994) Cabazon Cultural Museum
"Spirit of Life" (1994) Ogden School (private school), Chicago, IL
"Spirit of La Quinta" (1992) La Quinta Civic Center, La Quinta, CA
"Friends & Lovers" (1992) Ferguson Public Library, Stamford, CT