

SCULPTED

HUMOR

BURBANK ARTIST AND
GALLERY OWNER BILL CZAPPA
TURNS FOUND OBJECTS INTO
MASTERPIECES

by Anayat Durrani

From his *Pressed Duck* to his *Spaghetti Flag*, Bill Czappa of Burbank, California, is as original as they get. With a flair for the unusual, his sculptures communicate and carry his famous signature mark stamped all over them – his great sense of humor.

“The message I am trying to communicate is mostly humor,” says Bill. “I like things to be funny and uplifting. And I love to use a play on words, as in my newest piece, *Peice De Resistanc* which is made of electronic components called resistors.”

Bill says he creates art that the average viewer can relate to and understand. He says humor is a “great take off point for art” and is a pleasant emotion for the viewer. *Pressed Duck* always gets people to laugh.



“I feel that for a work to be great art it must have an emotional impact and communicate something to the viewer. The more people it communicates with and for the greatest period of time is a measure of the greatness of the work of art,” he says.

DAD SETS THE FOUNDATION

Bill credits his father, a former tailor who worked as a machinist, as having a major influence on his skills as an artist. His father used to construct small buildings and additions on their property. When Bill was little, his father took an old tricycle and added a train engine to it. As Bill peddled it down the sidewalk the tricycle often gained the attention of curious passersby who wanted to know where he had bought it.

Bill is a self-taught artist and began honing his skills early on. In junior high he took woodworking and metalworking shop and soon began building skateboards and surfboards, and further developed his skills working with fiberglass. He also had access to his dad’s garage, power tools and odd parts that he experimented with. A major influence on his work is the late sculptor Edward Kienholz (1927-1994), famous for his sculptures, drawings and tableaux comprised of found objects. His pieces often have a strong message.

From then on, Bill began using found objects in



Peice de Resistanc

his sculptures. His first major work, *The Frodis*, is a sculpture that originated from memories of his many trips with his father on their way to go fishing. *The Frodis* is a black painted sculpture made of parts his father had brought home and other things Bill had collected. The sculpture had an eye, and when activated, the eye would open so that the sculpture would look back out at the viewer.



Spruce Goose II

ART SCHOOL AND BEYOND

Bill continued making sculptures and paintings throughout high school and then went on to get his Associate Degree in Art from Santa Monica College. He built a cabin cruiser that he lived aboard in Marina Del Rey while finishing school.

In his courses in art, Bill excelled at building three-dimensional pieces. He had an art teacher who believed in taking an idea and letting students run with it and it was here that Bill began to push things to the limit. One assignment was to create a piece that

is a child's toy. Bill's creation: a bucket of mud with a recipe for mud pies attached to the pail.

After college, Bill began working as a color TV technician for RCA Service Company, where he further expanded his skills in electronics. He eventually opened an art studio in North Hollywood where he began to really explore art. Bill says that though he did not have much money at the time he used whatever objects he came across that interested him, such as old pieces of metal, wood and weathered objects of all kinds. He also came across a business nearby that dismantled houses and sold their parts: old windows, plumbing and wood of all sorts. With all these materials he began making wall hangings and freestanding sculptures. He also began incorporating things found at antique stores into his artwork.

"I am inspired by the idea of a piece. Sometimes it is just the title or a phrase and then I think, how would I make that piece and what materials will I need?" explains Bill. "Like the piece

Hollywood, I found the purple back drop on the street but the

main idea for the piece was just showing my dad's old 8mm movie camera filming a rock. The rest just grew out of that idea."

After getting his first computer, he began to dabble in writing, which he then incorporated into his work. *Carpenter's Lament* contains one of his poems and other works contain short sayings. His piece called *Redundant* was made of the word "redundant" repeated over fifty times.

EXPOSURE FOR HIS WORK

Around this time Bill began to show his work to get some public response. He was a runner up for, but did not win, the young talent award from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art when he was 35. At Expo 1998 at the L.A. Convention Center, he was chosen as one of the cutting edge artists. And in January of 1990, he had a commissioned installation with two other artists, Edward Goldstein and Lauralee Coles, at the Union Gallery at the University of Arizona. He has had numerous shows throughout L.A.

In the early 80s, Bill says he began to notice the commercialism of art in LA. He was dismayed at how new artists often found it difficult to have their work shown, while many poor quality and uninspired works were easily exhibited. Beginning in 1982, Bill began a nine-year series of work which “consisted of giving a specially made work of art to a non-selling gallery, with the instructions that, ‘It required them to make some decision or perform some action.’” He said the purpose of the series was to test these organizations and see their reaction to art that they were forced to deal with that did not come from a recognized source.

He sent his piece, *In Case of Emergency*, to the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), that contained a one hundred-dollar bill behind a piece of glass in a picture frame, and attached to the frame was a hammer. MOCA tried to get Bill to take the piece back because they did not accept art donations unless they went through a committee process. Bill sent a note back explaining he didn’t want it back and they could do with it what they wanted. He says the director of MOCA and five staff decided the piece was not art and split the hundred dollars among them. He says they threw out the rest of the piece but kept the hammer. But they failed to read his note, he says, as sometimes he bought his pieces back and they had no idea what he might pay for his own piece.



Hollywood

CONNECTING UP WITH FINE ART REGISTRY™

Bill recently joined Fine Art Registry so that his work could be documented.

“I like the aspect that if a piece was ever stolen it could be traced and or ownership could be established. I had not really realized until I checked the site that you would also be able to have your work seen there also, and the more exposure the better.”

Bill has already permanently tagged his artwork using Fine Art Registry tags and added several pieces to his online portfolio. A wider audience can now view and appreciate his life’s work.

“I think other artists would do well to join and be able to enjoy all of the above but also print out a form showing provenance to anyone who buys their work,” says Bill. “It does establish that an artist made a piece at a certain point in time and that is really a nice safety factor in case someone tries to copy a work. And that is something I had worried about for years.”

NEVER-ENDING IDEAS

Where does Bill come up with all these ideas for his artwork? He says he gets them from watching movies, or hearing something on TV or by finding objects that lead him to a piece.

“If I get an idea I write it down on a piece of paper and now have a whole file of over a hundred pieces I need to yet make,” explains Bill. “The materials come out of the idea, as in *Spaghetti Flag*, made of spaghetti noodles and sauce. Sometimes the object comes first and then I have to figure out what the piece will be about.”

Bill says he prefers to make only one-of-a-kind or classic pieces like his *Please Stand By* work. He says he is only “in search of the best of a series, not twenty variations of a single idea.” He has also made his own versions of classic pieces, such as Van Gogh’s *Starry Night*. His *Starry Night* is a piece of sand paper covered with resin, which makes the silicon sanding particles twinkle like a starry night.

Of all his pieces, Bill says probably his favorite is *Spruce Goose II* about Howard Hughes. He said it was the hardest to make and took over 500 hours to create.

“I also like that it is kinetic. The propellers actually start up and it sounds like a real airplane. The lights also light and the tail and steering wheel turn randomly.”

Bill owns ARC TV & VCR in Burbank which, aside from being a television store, is also Burbank’s oldest art gallery. He says he started the TV shop to make the art possible.

“It is what has allowed me to make art without having to worry about selling it. The gallery though has taken on a life of its own which is great.”

Since his store opened in 1983, Bill has created a hundred complex sculptures from found objects, shown at various art shows throughout Los Angeles. The gallery, which exhibits his pieces, is open Monday through Saturday and is free to the public (ARC TV, 2529 W. Magnolia, Burbank, CA, 91505). ↵

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work here at his
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