

The Immortals: Hemingway, Marilyn Monroe, Diana, Princess of Wales

My inspiration for "The Immortals" manifested itself from two interests: drawing portraits and biographies. The show is a collection of contemporary portraiture combining elements of realism with vigorous brushwork using encaustic paint. The subjects are 20th century luminaries who made preeminent contributions to literature, cinema and humanitarianism. Each figure is depicted in a peaceful surrounding in their prime of youth. They are brought together by a common fate – all died tragically. Death is symbolized by painting each figure with closed eyes. My influence stems from Victorian post-mortem photography which was popular with the middle class. Less expensive than painted commissioned pictures, photography allowed the middle classes to memorialize deceased loved ones. These photographs tended to depict the corpses as still living propped up on furniture or held by a family member. My goal is to offer a sense of peacefulness and familiar place or image to each person to counteract his or her tragic death.

I begin my paintings with a contour drawing and fill in layers of paint until I achieve the desired colours and patterns. The uneven, sculptural texture of my encaustic technique helps to scatter reflected light giving the surface a luminous quality. I use encaustic painting, which I first learned in 2001, to embody a timeless, otherworldly quality and stillness to each figure. Encaustic is an Ancient Greek form of painting that is comprised of mixing beeswax and pigment. Each layer of encaustic must be fused together on the surface with a heat gun. The oldest surviving encaustic portraits are the Fayum funeral portraits produced by Greek artists in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD in Greco-Roman Egypt. These portraits of the deceased were commissioned by families and used as memorials. The use of encaustic to create my death portraits is a fitting tribute not only to my Greek ancestors but also to each figure immortalizing them in the 21st century.

Hemingway is recognized as the greatest literary influence of the 20th century, revolutionizing prose and modernizing English literature. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954. His life ended tragically on July 2, 1961 when he shot himself to death at his home in Idaho.

After reading Hemingway's memoir, *A Moveable Feast*, about his life in Paris, I chose to portray him as a young man, when he achieved international recognition after the publication of *The Sun Also Rises*. The life-size representation is a nod to his larger than life persona.

"Once writing has become your major vice and greatest pleasure only death can stop it."
Ernest Hemingway, 1958

Marilyn Monroe remains the greatest icon of cinema and American pop culture. Her image still endures fifty years after her suicide from a drug overdose in 1962. Despite having a deplorable childhood having suffered child abuse and poverty, she rose to become an award winning actress and the greatest sex symbol of all time. Monroe eventually became a victim of her own image. Unable to be taken seriously in Hollywood she fell deeper into depression and relied heavily on drugs. Her tragic and still controversial death at age 36 immortalized her into a modern legend.

My portrait of Marilyn Monroe represents her in her prime, as a world famous actress. She is surrounded by the red and white stripes of the American flag that allude to her pop icon status. The flag is collaged with newspaper from August 5, 2012, the 50th anniversary of Monroe's death.

"I knew I belonged to the public and to the world, not because I was talented or even beautiful but because I had never belonged to anything or anyone else." Marilyn Monroe

August 31, 2012 marked the 15th anniversary of the tragic death of Diana, Princess of Wales. Her legacy includes increasing worldwide awareness of AIDS, leprosy and land mines. Her work continues through The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund which has raised an estimated £200 million to date for international charities. "Diana's overall effect on charity is probably more significant than any other person in the twentieth century." Stephen Lee, The Institute of Charity Fundraising Managers.

I have chosen to depict Diana, Princess of Wales, as a "sleeping beauty" giving her a peaceful aura and portraying her in the "revenge dress" designed by Christina Stambolian and worn by the Princess in 1994. The dress went against royal protocol – royals wear black for mourning; it was low cut and provocative. Her image wearing this dress came to symbolize the Princess' new found independence.

"Nothing brings me more happiness than trying to help the most vulnerable people in society. It is a goal and an essential part of my life – a kind of destiny. Whoever is in distress can call on me. I will come running wherever they are." Diana, Princess of Wales

1. Title: "Hemingway In Paris"; Encaustic on board; 48"x72"
2. Title: "Fifty Stars in One"; Encaustic and newspaper dated August 5, 2012 on board
3. Title: "Sleeping Beauty"; Encaustic on board; 36"x72"