

Julia (Julie) Macdonald 1926-1982 Pasadena, California



Renowned sculptor and wild animal enthusiast, Julia Lee Macdonald was the daughter of a prominent Los Angeles Attorney and fly-fishing expert Alexander Macdonald and Aileen Adams, an impressionist painter, socialite and expert in Bonsai technique and Chinese art.

Macdonald's artwork was part of several famous collections, including that of Hirshhorn Museum, in Washington, DC, Randhurst Regional Center in Chicago, Adams Plaza, Los Angeles, Peggy Guggenheim, Oscar de la Hoya, Coretta Scott King, the Sacramento, California K Street child's play area, and Pasadena Art Museum among many others. She was listed Contemporary California Art from the Lytton Collection, and in American Artist Magazine, May 1968.



Ocean Creature #2, 1961, Marble and lignum vitae, by Julie Macdonald, in Hirshhorn Museum's Speculative Forms collection.

The sculptor's work reflected mid-Century modernist sensibilities and were more impressionist than realistic. Fascinated by the animals she surrounded herself with, the sculptor often used them as models for her works. She worked primarily in wood and stone, often using semi-precious stones as accents on her pieces, such as rubies for the eyes of a mouse. Otherwise, her work reflected her vast array of knowledge in a variety of areas. Subjects also included mythology, family life and at times oversized phallic pieces in serpentine or black marble.

Personal Life

Macdonald attended the same finishing school as another extremely tall woman named Julia, in this case Julia Child. Like Ms Child she was bred for cotillions and debutante parties but was born for a Bohemian life of art, travel, culture and excess.

Known to friends as Julie, the sculptor finished high school at the Katherine Branson School for Girls (at the time a boarding school for well-to-do young ladies in the historic hamlet of Ross, California). She then spent a year at Stanford University before transferring and finishing her bachelor's degree at the Chouinard Art Institute, a distinguished art school in Los Angeles until it was absorbed into CalArts in 1961.

She was married twice and famously had a long standing on again off again romance with jazz icon Charlie "Bird" Parker. Her second husband was respected Los Angeles studio musician and jazz arranger/composer William "Bill" Hood. That marriage ended in 1977, though they remained lifelong friends.

Like her mother, Macdonald was a devotee of Asian art, and had within her personal collection Tibetan prayer wheels, Japanese obi, Chinese snuff bottles, and Hiroshige prints. Her interest expanded to include African art as she became steeped in the civil rights movement.

The 6' 2" tall sculptor was an active member of the Pasadena, California Chapter of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and a vocal proponent of civil rights. Her dedication even resulted in being named president of her chapter, a position she rejected in recognition of more qualified African-American candidates. Her belief in the equality of all people also informed her artworks and the places she chose to be displayed.

Macdonald was known for the large number of animals ever present in her home, up to three dogs and 24 cats. The animal's feeding time was a choreographed ritual. Some pets needed to be fed before others, put in a special position on the floor, or a bowl lifted to reduce the pain of an arthritic neck.

Her personality was full of contradictions. While she could be witty, loving, accepting and kind, she could also be neglectful, physically, and verbally abusive, and at times cruel. One thing was certain: animals, jazz and civil rights always came first. Her obsessions and passions consumed her, much to the chagrin of her two children Judy and Alex Macdonald III, and stepchildren during her marriage to Bill Hood.

In addition to a menagerie of dogs and cats, Macdonald raised baboons, hyenas, a kinkajou, a jaguarundi, a pygmy marmoset monkey, and numerous other wild animals in her home. Her observations of baboons resulted in a book entitled, *Almost Human*, which included the first

baboon/human dictionary. This work was infamously plagiarized by a zoology student as her doctoral thesis.

Known for her ribald stories, enormous vocabulary and love of jazz, Macdonald hosted a New Year's Party every year in her home, which was steps from the Pasadena Rose Parade route. There, as she described it, "a jazz optometrist could talk to a jazz garbage man or a jazz lawyer to a jazz dentist and a jazz musician as equals because everyone loved jazz." Her home was so close to the parade, that some years bands and floats waited their turn on her street, prompting her to fantasize about creating a float filled flowers from her enormous garden with jazz musicians performing an impromptu concert upon it as it turned onto Orange Grove Boulevard.

She once owned a Ferrari and claimed to have out driven the California Highway Patrol on the Pasadena Freeway. Her passion for Asian culture led to a short flirtation with a Chinese Junk (a type of sailing vessel).

Sadly, Macdonald excesses took their toll. A heavy smoker of menthol cigarettes, she had half a lung removed and a hysterectomy in the late 20s. Alcoholism and cocaine addiction led to more lung cancer and eventually brain cancer which took her life when she was only 55.



Bird, Macdonald's portrait of Charlie Parker, 1956



The Three Graces, Adams Plaza, Los Angeles, circa 1963