


GUY DILL

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A SCULPTURAL DANCE

Guy Dill's bronze sculptures are sexy – sleek, strong and very masculine. The push and pull of smooth metal forms arranged together and often, metaphorically speaking, held together with a strong metallic embrace. They are graceful and beautiful without a hint of whimsy – emotionally solid. Dill himself is a lot like that. He seems well grounded in his personal life – which he likes to keep private – and his professional life where he is not afraid to take risks. The metal sculptures are his bread and butter, but he also works in marble, dabbles in printmaking and has recently earned recognition for his charcoal drawings. In his Venice Beach studio he also has new work that hasn't been seen in public yet – amazingly subtle, it's almost the antithesis of his bronze work. But there is a common thread that runs through all of Dill's work. Whether it's three-dimensional or two, it always comes back to forms and lines and how the two work together – a lover's dance that is intoxicating.





Just a couple of blocks from the beach, Dill's 12,500 square foot studio sits behind two giant steel doors that slide sideways to reveal an open-air courtyard, flanked by a studio on one side and what amounts to gallery space on the other. Dill is a very fit 62 years old. To stay in shape he rides his bike and works. Making sculpture is a hard, sometimes backbreaking job and Dill is a workaholic. He's in the studio almost every day. Deliberate and thoughtful, he loves to talk about art and is reluctant to talk about himself. It's clear that the work is paramount.

Dill came to art in a round about way. Born and raised in Malibu, Dill's mother was a portrait painter and writer and his brother, Laddie John Dill, was also a painter, but Guy had yet to tap into his artistic side. Guy was always encouraged to follow his passions, and as a young man those passions leaned toward the sea and sailing, until fate interceded. It was the mid 1960's and Guy was in the Coast Guard, successfully avoiding combat in Vietnam. After several weeks at sea, Guy would look forward to visiting friends at Chouinard, a prestigious art school in Los Angeles.

Guy especially liked to tag along to drawing class. He loved everything about it, from the smell of oil paint to the live, nude models. The instructor didn't mind but suggested that if he was going to hang out he had better bring a drawing pad. Guy figured that if that was the price of admission he was willing to pay. He started drawing. One teacher even put him in a box – literally. A refrigerator box was outfitted with a light bulb and a peephole, and through that small opening Dill would sketch the naked model. A pretty interesting exercise for a young guy with limited art experience. He laughs when he thinks about it now. He says the instructor wanted him to learn how to draw the model from the "inside out."

Eventually he had enough to put together a portfolio and with some encouragement applied to Chouinard. He really didn't have any artistic ambitions, but even if he wasn't ready to admit it, he was hooked. "The way they (artists) thought drew me in. People sharing ideas in a language I understood. It wasn't so much that I was striking out to be an artist. That was not my intention." In fact, he had plans to travel the world. He had secured his captain papers and was ready to start a company of charter schooners. After his stint in the Coast Guard he went back east to put all the pieces in place. With his boat temporarily in dry dock, he was hanging out in Montreal when he got the call – Chouinard had accepted him. It was decision time, and in the end art was more seductive than the sea. When asked why he chose art, Dill refers to the writing of Joseph Conrad – specifically this passage:

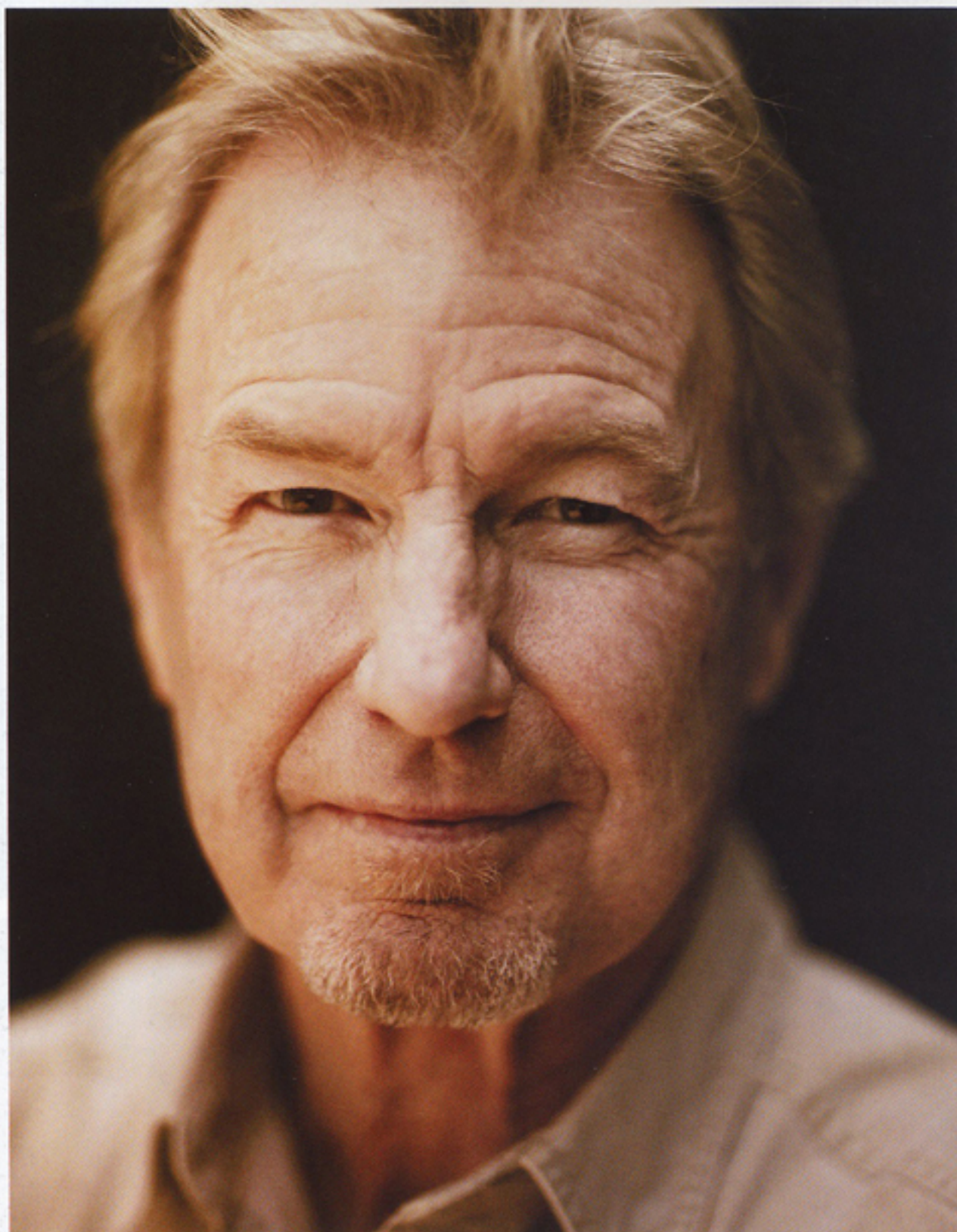
"In the immutability of their surroundings the foreign shores, the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life, glide past, veiled not by a sense of mystery but by a slightly disdainful ignorance."

GUY DILL - A SCULPTURAL DANCE

Dill believes in the journey, and art seemed to offer a trip with a deeper meaning and a better language to define the story of his life.

Guy returned to Los Angeles and immersed himself in school, but it would still be years before he considered himself an artist. "The badge of being an artist was a big deal for me," he says. "I was doing what I was doing because I was fascinated by it, but I wouldn't label myself because I had such high regard for artists."

Eventually he would have no choice but to acknowledge the label and his own life long commitment, but for the moment he was a young artist about to make the next bold move in his career – moving from painting to sculpture. "My degree was in painting, but essentially the day I graduated I stopped painting because it was not fulfilling in the physical sense. Painting is a different species, but I think drawing is the link. The language of drawing is the sharing of an idea with yourself." He had a lot of ideas and was ready to go to work. He set up shop in what was then a hippie enclave with lots of cheap, available real estate – a perfect place for free spirited artists to cut their collective teeth.



Venice, California, is a funky coastal community just south of Santa Monica. Muscle heads and misfits share space with tourists on the boardwalk. Trendy boutiques, cafes and design shops fill expensive real estate along Abbott Kinney and Main streets. With a history of social consciousness and tolerance for just about any lifestyle, Venice has long been a haven for creative types. Back in the day, Beat poets and artists hung out at the Gas House on the boardwalk or at the Venice Café on Dudley Street. Pacific Ocean Park (POP), an amusement park built on top of an old pier, anchored the social scene. Hollywood special effects people designed many of the attractions, but the popularity of POP faltered as bigger parks like Disneyland and Marineland came on line.

During this time Guy Dill and his contemporaries put down roots in Venice. After POP went into bankruptcy and left to deteriorate, Dill and some of his fellow artists created studios in abandoned space along the old pier. It was here that Dill started his sculpting career. In the beginning

he would build things incorporating a particular space – a type of installation art. More traditional sculpture would come later when Dill abandoned the space as part of the art. "Struggle is an interesting word," he says. "If I was struggling I wasn't aware of it. The struggle might have been in the studio with issues of the work – conflict of one thing working against another, or just putting something together – that can be a struggle, but 'struggling artist' that wasn't me." Dill was having fun.

The 1960's were evolutionary years for Southern California artists. Some young guns were making noise in the art world – names like Ed Ruscha, Billy Al Bengston, Ed Moses, Frank Gehry and Craig Kaufmann, and at the center of the L.A. art scene was the Ferus Gallery on La Cienega Boulevard in downtown L.A. The Ferus was the brainchild of Irving Blum who would later discover Guy Dill and give him a coveted spot in a group show. "There was a

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new crop of young artists known as the 'Venice Mafia,'" says Dill. "We were young, we were doing original work. There was a sense that something important was happening. It was exciting."

But even while Los Angeles and her artists were establishing themselves in the art world, there was still the old school view that all great art and