

ART & DESIGN

A Brush With Fame, Long Before His Life in Art

Jerry Torre, the Marble Faun, at Outsider Art Fair

By **WILLIAM GRIMES** JAN. 29, 2015

DEALERS tend to be fond of an artist with a story. Jerry Torre has a doozy. Several, in fact.

Mr. Torre, also known as the Marble Faun, is showing five sculptures at this year's Outsider Art Fair, at Center 548 in Chelsea, through Sunday. Last year, he exhibited his work for the first time in a two-person show at the Jackie Klempay Gallery in Bushwick, Brooklyn. The art fair is his first solo show, a much-delayed event for the 60-year-old artist, but not his first taste of fame.

Anyone who has seen "Grey Gardens," Albert and David Maysles's 1975 documentary about two women living in isolated squalor on an estate in East Hampton, N.Y., knows Mr. Torre as the live-in handyman and close friend to Edith Ewing Bouvier Beale (Big Edie) and her daughter, Edith Bouvier Beale (Little Edie), the aunt and first cousin of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis.

Mr. Torre, employed at a nearby estate, turned up at the doorstep of the two Edies, curious about their house. Little Edie, answering the door, said, "Oh my God, the Marble Faun has arrived," referring to the statue by Praxiteles in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel.

The Beale connection became a sort of career. Mr. Torre reappeared in the film's 2006 sequel, "The Beales of Grey Gardens." In the musical "Grey Gardens," which opened Off Broadway in 2006, his character figures in the third act. But there was more to Mr. Torre than Grey Gardens let on, a second life that Little Edie had unwittingly touched on with her Hawthorne allusion.

Growing up in Kensington, Brooklyn, Mr. Torre wandered among the mausoleums and statues of Green-Wood Cemetery. His uncle, a mason, taught him to work in stone. The sight of Michelangelo's "Pietà" at the 1964 New York World's Fair clinched the deal. He began to think of himself as a sculptor.

Life's vicissitudes intervened. After Grey Gardens, Mr. Torre worked as an assistant to the ventriloquist Wayland Flowers and through Aristotle Onassis landed a job tending a princely palace in Saudi Arabia. After returning to New York, he ran an art-moving business and then drove a cab for 20 years. On the side, he carved in stone.

Last year Ms. Klempay included him in a show at her gallery, which Rebecca Hoffman, the director of the Outsider Art Fair, had been following. Mr. Torre's works manage to touch on his life's big stopping points.

"Windsor," a snarling limestone gargoyle, part horse and part dragon, was inspired by the carved ornaments on a Midtown hotel that Mr. Torre often cruised by in his cab. "Confetti," a cast concrete horse's head, recalls a horse Mr. Torre rode across the desert. The original, in Carrara marble, is intended for his grave.

He has kept a foot in Grey Gardens. It looms large in a memoir he is finishing. In June, Albert Maysles will show a documentary, "The Marble Faun of Grey Gardens," at the Maysles Documentary Center in Harlem. "It's about me, of course," Mr. Torre said. "It's always about me."

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