

Robert Graham

born 1938, Mexico
resides in Venice, California

education / professional experience

Moved as a young teenager from Mexico to Silicon Valley, Robert Graham attended San Jose State College from 1961 to 63, and finished his studies at San Francisco Art Institute in 1964.

THE MUSEUM ENTRANCE GATES

bas relief sculpture, 1988
cast bronze and copper
located at the front entrance to the Museum

description / design

The elegant and simply designed doors are consistent with Robert Graham's traditional presentation of his nude figures. Cast bronze panels hang within an open frame, substantial and geometric, offering strong contrast to the gesture and delicacy of the standing female nudes. Graham has only partially revealed each figure within the planar surface, allowing the viewer to imagine the parts submerged. Fluid and active modeling with closely observed skeletal structure, sensual musculature and fleshy forms melt into the background surface.

exterior side of door; Figures pose with active knees or thighs or hands or toes or buttocks expertly and beautifully defined. An inscribed line divides each individual image from the next with deep blue-green patinas and subtle variations from blacks to warm grays. Five figures gesture on the left panel while on the right four bodies seem to dance for the viewer.

interior side of door; Two repetitious panels contain a carefully defined realistic bas relief, the back view of a slim female figure, submerged in the bronze surface as though an illusion or perhaps an emerging shape becoming clear. Surrounding the middle panel is a vertical arrangement of medallions, cast imprints of parts of the figure— body fragments, some negative and some positive in appearance. The difference between the two casts is mostly in the color of patina and the shiny surface effect of visitors rubbing the large figures.

subject / title

The subject — the nude — becomes for Graham a metaphor for the human spirit. He sees the female figure an expression of the human connection with life and experience. He has sculpted the female human figure throughout his career. 'For me, anything that pretends not to refer to the human body is a lie. The body's sexuality isn't about me. It's about what's already out there.'

style

In the 1970s, Robert Graham began doing photos of a live model from various views and photographing the same pose using other models. From these, he sculpted a master mold of the pose. The slim strong females are sculptures, not people; there is a tension between objectification and liveliness, between the naturalism of his modeling and the pure abstraction of the sculptured design. Graham has refused to yield to the feminists who demand that the female nude be banished from legitimate aesthetic discourse. By continuing to define his icons of objectified desire, he implies that sublimated sexual drive is one of the few well-springs of vitality that can be maintained over a lifetime. Graham uses the lost wax method of casting, a complicated process which captures in molten bronze the precise surface of the original with exacting clarity.

tour anecdotes

Robert Graham is married to actress Angelica Huston and works near the beach in Venice, Ca. His life is a mixture of social Hollywood events and a rigorous daily schedule spent in his studio working on shows and commissions. His public commissions include the "Olympic Torso" for the 1984 Olympics, and for downtown San Jose, a three ton stone image of Quetzalcoatl, the Aztec deity represented by a feathered snake.