

'Can You Tell That's Me?'

THE VERY SPECIAL EFFECTS OF EUGENE'S TODD BOKICH: MASKS, BOOBS AND SEX TOYS

By Ester Barkai

Visiting Todd Bokich's studio in Eugene, I get a feeling I'm on a journey to the heart of darkness. In one of the rooms the head of a half woman/half pig hangs upside down from a window. Enormous breasts sit on a pedestal, partly covered by an old bra.

I also see a lovely garden planted in the yard. While the place isn't anyone's last stand, it's not exactly a Disney movie inside, either.

Bokich, a maskmaker and Hollywood effects designer, has been traveling for the past 20 years. He toured Europe with a rhythm-and-blues band, worked as an artist in Prague and went to Thailand on a quest to be revitalized.

Now he's brought his makeup-artist business to Eugene and founded Eugene Artist Cooperative.

Bokich originally wanted to settle in Seattle but found warehouses were all taken by marijuana businesses. Working his way south, he finally settled in an industrial area in west Eugene.

"Halloween is my holiday," he told me on the phone before giving directions to his studio/residency/artist's cooperative. "You can't miss it. It's the building with the heads in the window."

There I find myself face to face with the bald head of a heavily made up female with a wire attached for a robotic mouth.

Other pieces in the front room include "Primordial Windmill" and "Primordial Telephone," surreal bronze sculptures exhibited with Eugene Artist Cooperative, which shares Bokich's studio space. He rents rooms to more than a dozen artists.

The masks and body parts are available for viewing and purchase at MakeupArtist.com (the "MakeupArtist" domain was taken) and are listed under the categories of Halloween, fetish, female, carnival, custom or metallic.

I ask about Bokich about his life abroad, and he speaks fondly of the glass-walled studio he had in Prague, where on nights with a full moon he worked only by moonlight. Otherwise he steers the conversa-



FEMALE HEAD WITH ROBOTIC MOUTH

Photo by Ester Barkai

tion back to one thing: latex.

Most special-effects artists, he says, buy their latex. But he developed his own formula based on a chemistry book he read. Once he started talking about polymers and vulcanization, I admit I had a hard time following. I actually raised my hand once to ask a question.

He answered the way I remembered my math teachers did — quickly and without explanation. Then he gave me a tour of the studio, past a wall of molds and back to the vulcanizer he made.

Bokich was always interested in science as well as art. He picks up a small sculpture he made as a kid. His mother bought it from him, as she did other art, "so I wouldn't give it to all the girls."

During grade school he built a rocket and, at one point, caused a fireball explosion. In high school he studied chemistry and was in charge of the lab. Then in college he studied science but didn't pursue it because he thought he would be bored in a lab or some such other place where boys outnumbered girls.

Seeing me stare at the half-pig face by the window, he says people love that mask. It's called Piggy Sue. "I almost can't make enough of those," Bokich says.

He sold two of them to an Australian horror filmmaker who had the characters of murderers wear them. The big Hollywood studios have in-house special-effects people. They don't need his operation, which is why his clients are independent moviemakers abroad.

Besides selling for Halloween and to independent filmmakers, he sells to people looking for carnival masks, men who want latex female parts, "women who have been disfigured" and to porn stars.

Mostly, however, to porn stars. He shows me a photograph of a woman wearing fake breasts so large I can't imagine what size cup they'd be. He sells size "F" through "J" on his site, but these breasts look off the chart.

He offers three Trump masks in his catalog: Hitler Trump, cross-dressing transgender Trump and zombie apocalypse Donald Trump. They aren't selling in the U.S., though. They sell better in Germany.

We wonder out loud about the reason, but personally I can't help thinking maybe a Hitler Trump is just too much.

Bokich himself is a man who has worn many masks. He's been a science student, a musician, a traveler, an artist and a makeup (or "makup") artist. Showing me the catalog of his masks, he points to one. "Can you tell that's me inside?"

He points to another and asks the same question, and then again: "Can you tell that's me in there?" ■

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