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# A Humble Genius

## Jason Griego's Sculptures Capture the Essence of Being

Story by Libby Allen

Photos by Dorf Ludlow, Ben Sandoval and courtesy of Griego Studios

As I walked into Studio 831 on Royal Street in the French Quarter, I only thought one thing: "how utterly strange and incredibly cool are these things!" These things, being sculptures ranging in size from petite to lifesize, which resemble, among other things, Mayan artifacts, gothic totems, and hauntingly elegant angels.

Jason Griego is the master mind behind these evocative creations. A resident of the San Francisco Bay area, he's been a professional sculptor for the past fourteen years. Griego creates, molds, and develops the sculptures in his studio, which coincidentally doubles as his home, in an old converted 1920s department store, spanning a mere 20,000 square feet - a far cry from his first studio, which was a broom closet. While he didn't grow up with artistic aspirations, Griego certainly discovered his talents in an unconventional way.

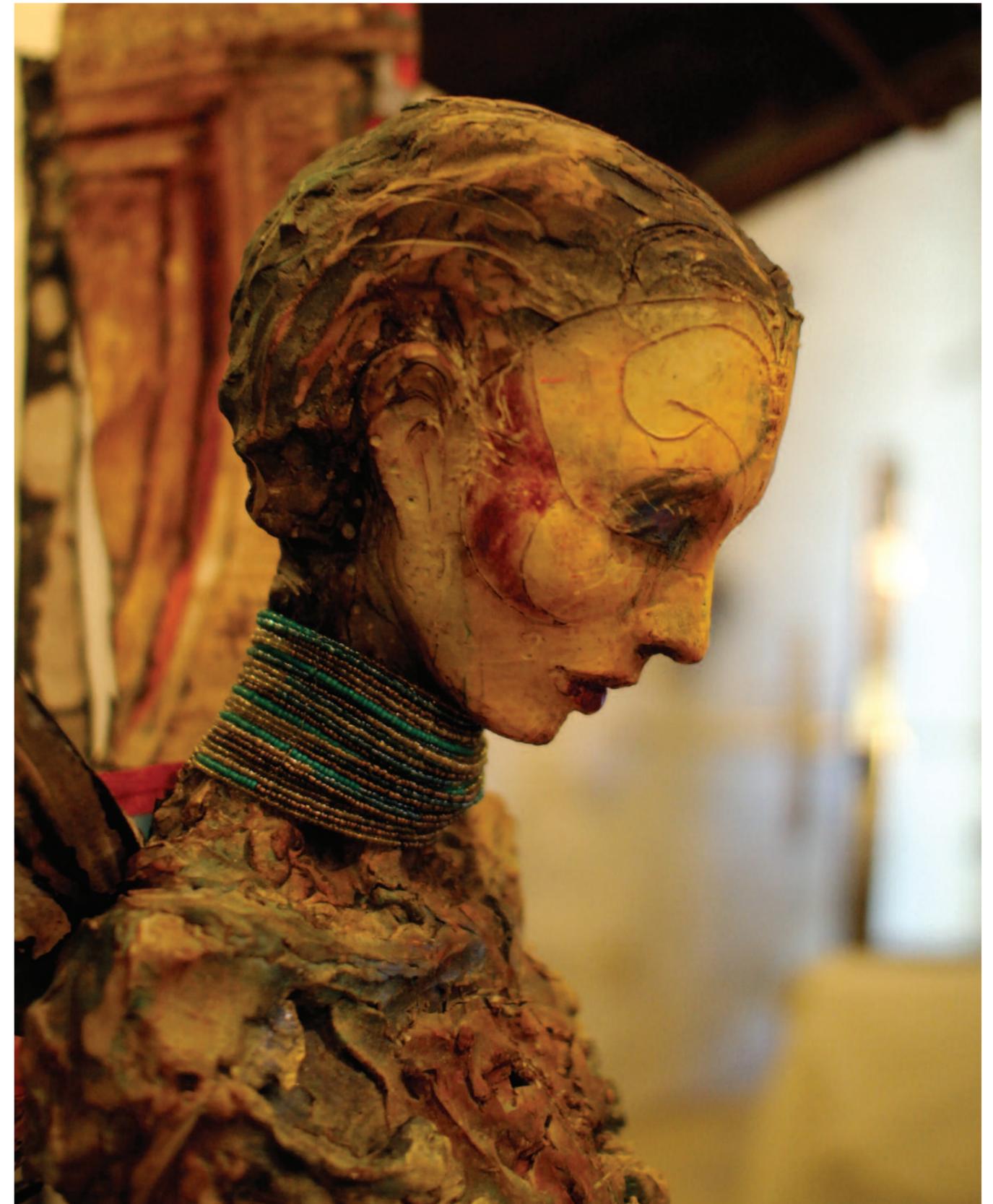
"I went to bed one night and had a dream or vision, whatever you want to call it, that I was going to be a sculptor. At 3am I woke up my wife, and told her I was going to be a sculptor. She said 'that's wonderful honey', gave me a kiss on the cheek and went back to bed. And now fast-forward to today," Griego said.

Griego casts his sculptures using a special process that incorporates pulverized cow and chicken bone and resin. During the casting process, many different materials are added to create different effects, including sage, cinnamon, glass, stone, wood, metals and even Snapple drinks. Natural pigments are embedded into the casting process to infuse the color into the sculpture.

Like all great artists, Griego has a bona fide road dog; his brother, who also shares the studio and living space with Jason and his family. "There are many aspects

↓ *The Pencil is in the Ground*  
2010  
Mixed Media  
3/4 Life Size

→ *The Bell Tower*  
2011  
Mixed Media  
3/4 Life Size





about the business of being a sculptor that aren't a part of the creative process, such as making sure the studio is stocked with materials, making molds of the sculptures, and helping with sculpture deliveries, etc. Anthony helps me with these aspects of the business," Griego said.

"I use special techniques I've created over the last decade to ensure that each individual sculpture is unique. The sculpture is first envisioned and created in clay, a mold is made, and - using a special casting process and materials - the sculpture is cast. I then use many different processes, including kerosene, fire and other elements, to create the organic and raw patina for each piece."

The result of these works is something profoundly introspective and intriguing to the viewer. Griego strives to produce art that is the essence of a person or thing, and to mirror life in a way that causes the viewer to react; he has achieved this artfully and masterfully. Griego's sculptures are reminiscent of a Tim Burton character; hauntingly curious and beautiful. Though they are perhaps a bit eerie on first glance, you become attached to, or intrigued by these characters the longer you stare, finding intricate details that are undoubtedly there for a purpose. For instance, the piece "Humble Genius" was devised using a pulley-rig system that cranks when turned clockwise. While the work may not be humble, it is quite ingenious. By turning a crank, the bell tolls and an idea is born.

"Sculptures are many things. They are vessels. They are the root. They are still, they breathe. They are strong, they are resigned. They are beautiful, they are ugly. They are everything and they are one thing. They are mirrors to ourselves."

Griego's use of materials and his dynamic inventive process creates sculptures that have a raw and organic beauty echoing the Japanese philosophy of Wabi Sabi - the art of finding beauty in imperfection, and profundity in the natural order of things. Nonetheless, his work tugs on sentimental heart strings, and draws emotion from its viewers.

According to Griego, the depth of the inspiration of his work can get lost in translation. "It's difficult to translate the language of sculpture into the language of words. It becomes a copy of a copy - it loses resolution in the translation. Sculptures only become alive when they are viewed directly. They're a delivery system or a language used to convey an emotion or idea in a very singular way."

Griego's family plays a role in the creative process of his art as well. The innocence of childhood is part of what draws Griego to create his work, and his family and children help carve out the characters that become the result of the artist's sculptures.

"I see my artwork and my family not as two separate things, but one unit. It's gratifying that my children, being raised around art, believe the world is a creative place. In fact, until recently, my five-year-old daughter Nya thought that everyone was an artist, and that everyone had



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← (opposite) **Pyramid III**  
2012  
Mixed Media  
Life Size Bust

↖ **Proving Ground**  
2012  
Mixed Media  
Petite Size

↑ **The Key**  
2012  
Mixed Media  
Petite Size



a studio. She thought that all kids spent their Saturdays with their fathers hunting for wings of angels. Having children redoubles your effort in creating even more meaningful artwork," Griego said.

By incorporating raw materials - found by sifting through old and forgotten objects - into his sculptures, Griego creates a feeling of nostalgia and remembrance. His work is given a different interpretation by each individual viewer.

While all of Griego's works are unique and original, his inspiration is grounded in painters and sculptors such as Alberto Giacometti, Auguste Rodin, and Egon Schiele, whose diverse etchings and sculptures of raw emotion come together to form the personable and eerily romantic figures that inspire Griego's own work.

His sculptures allow our personal and inner emotions to be reflected back to us. The figures, with their strong silhouettes (defiance) and detailed surfaces (surrender), show us as we ought to be - noble and strong, with an inner dignity. They reveal how all things are temporary and all things are forever. He takes sculpture and strips it down to its purest essence - honesty. ■

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↑ *The Humble Genius*  
2011  
Mixed Media  
Life Size Bust

→ *Butterfly Girl*  
2009  
Mixed Media  
3/4 Life Size

