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PRESSBOOK

Mia Fonsagrives Solow
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Quest

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AN ARTIST'S DREAM COMES TRUE

BY ALEX TRAVERS



“SO,” SAYS MIA Fonsagrives-Solow, holding out her hand as she reveals a ring, “this is my robot.”

Fonsagrives-Solow has come to the Mark Hotel’s restaurant from her nearby New York City studio where she works as a sculptor and jewelry designer, a career she has successfully enjoyed for over 50 years. She didn’t start making robots until six years ago. They were originally sculptures, cast in bronze or aluminum.

At first, there wasn’t much consideration about assembling robots in any form until working with wood, one of her earliest passions, became too difficult. Allergies got in the way. But when she moved with her younger son to Greenwich while he attended high school, she began “noticing all this excess stuff in the house.” She had an idea. Or, rather, a way to create robots out of recycled goods. A Kleenex box would become a waist and a head. Paper towel rolls functioned as arms and legs.

Mia had always loved science. When she was young, her father made films for the Hayden Planetarium. Her parents (model Lisa Fonsagrives and photographer Fernand Fonsagrives) met when they had preformed together in the ballet in Paris. They split up when Mia was around seven years old. Her mother later married the photographer Irving Penn. For a while, Mia’s father

was upset. But after the first year of divorce Irving and Fernand became friends. “Everything was play with [Fernand],” she says. “Everything was work with Irving.”

Things got hard, emotionally, for Mia in school. “They didn’t talk about divorce in those days. I blamed myself, like most kids do. I kept [my feelings] inside and I’d draw these horrid houses with teeth in the windows.” Her art teachers were disturbed and suggested she enroll in a shop class. Sixth grade was best because of this experience. “Do you know what shellac smells like?” she asks me. “It’s just wonderful.” (Many of her early works are large wooden sculptures.)

Several reputable galleries have represented Fonsagrives-Solow. But until recently, most of her works were stored in different places. Some were in garages. Others in attics, basements. “All my life I wanted a storage space for my sculptures,” she tells me. About 18 months ago, her older son bought her a large barn in East Hampton. Almost everything has now been shipped there.

What was it like, I ask, to see all your work in one place? She considers this for a moment, and her body language changes. “I bought a sofa and sat down and wept,” she says. “To see 50 years of work all together in one space—it was so moving for me.” ♦

COURTESY OF MIA FONSSAGRIVES-SOLOW



This page: A selection of sculptures by artist and jewelry designer Mia Fossagrives-Solow in her East Hampton barn. Fifty years of collective work now inhabits the space. Opposite page: Fossagrives-Solow (pictured) is fascinated by robots: "I always loved them but didn't think about making them until I couldn't work in wood anymore."