

## Christy Gast Sculpts ‘Barefoot Mailman’

A curious and historically-inspired new public artwork springs up in Bal Harbour.



Christy Gast stands next to her *Self Portrait As The Barefoot Mailman*

This past weekend, artist Christy Gast unveiled her 12-foot, bronzed fiberglass *Self Portrait As The Barefoot Mailman* sculpture at Bal Harbour Founder’s Circle as part of the community’s “Unscripted” public art series. The piece nods South Florida’s legendary barefoot mailmen, who walked the route between Palm Beach and Miami in the 1880s, before there were roads and Henry Flagler’s famed railway.

Gast’s submission idea was born when she happened across a historic plaque describing these contracted postmen. As she began to research the topic, she learned that the “Unscripted” sites overlapped with the old delivery route. “The idea of being alone and walking on the beach was really romantic for me,” says Gast. “I wanted to play with that concept.” Play she did: to add a personal touch, Gast used herself as a model (with the help of a high-tech 3D scanner) and turned the piece on its head, literally. “To me, it resembles an hourglass, which is another way of measuring time,” she explains.

The more feminine hourglass shape also helped demasculinize the notion of classic statues. Says Gast, “My work always expresses my interests, particularly landscapes and places. I’ve done a lot of performance, incorporating my body, so this was a natural process for me.”

Also symbolic is the piece’s wedged in position, making it look as though it may have been washed up during a turbulent Florida storm. And of course, the mailman’s bare feet are better displayed with the sculpture turned upside down: “People are going to see this from their cars. I wanted the viewer to recognize it quickly and say ‘I get that it’s a monument, but it seems like something is wrong. I need to investigate this.’” Related photography prints by Gast are available for those passersby who want to take a piece of the sculpture home, and the artist will join Miami Art Museum director Thom Collins this Thursday, May 16 (7 p.m.) for a talk at Books & Books Bal Harbour.