



CHIPPIE KENNEDY

Photography by Bruce Murray / VisionFire Studios and StillNation Photography



CHIPPIE KENNEDY, who rotates between her studios in Nova Scotia, Canada, and Naples, Florida, has taken inspiration from family since childhood. Her aunt designed for Saks Fifth Avenue, while an uncle pioneered in prosthetics in the film industry and even created false eyelashes in Britain during the 1960s. Chippie is a keen knitter and cook. Her greatest joys are her three adorable grandchildren, but she also loves her French poodle, Luna, who hates going to Chippie's studio because she is not the focus of attention there!

Chippie may be the silliest of names, but I curse myself for not having legally adopted it instead of Karen, the name given to me at birth. My older sister, who rechristened me “Chippie,” must have had a premonition that it would suit me best. It did, and it stuck.

I grew up in the small town of Kanata, Ontario, where I learned to sew by watching my mother and began making all my own clothing at just 8 years of age. Later, as an entrepreneurial 14-year-old, I often stayed up all night sewing Raggedy Ann dolls to sell to my teachers and other adults in my world.

Obsessive? Certainly. Possessed of an almost uncontrollable urge toward creativity? Absolutely. I didn't know anyone else like me until I went off to design school at age 18 and met other young people as passionately creative and driven.

After graduating from Ryerson University (now known as Toronto Metropolitan University) in Toronto at age 21, I founded a design house called Shibui Ltd. with two of my peers. We optimistically produced everything from jeans to evening gowns — until a recession defeated us. I then worked for the McCall Pattern Company in Toronto and New York, where I met my husband, Bob, a McCall's executive.

We married and had a child, but Bob still found the time to introduce me to horseback riding. I was skeptical until I saw the fabulous outfit I would get to wear — the boots, the jacket, the hat! I've always been one to jump into new interests with both feet. I went all out. We bought a farm in the Hudson Valley, populated it with horses, and went riding every day. Still, the urge to create pulled at me.

When I wasn't riding *dressage* style, I raised alpacas and processed their wool. When that proved too daunting a task, I transitioned into designing jewelry, then knitting small, bejeweled evening handbags out of sterling silver wire.



I'm happy to say the name Chippie still suits me, although I no longer flit bird-like from one artistic obsession to another. At the age of 50, I at last discovered my true passion, fell deeply in love and settled down. Today, sculpting and I share an unbreakable bond. We meet each day in a fabulous studio by Lunenburg Harbor in Nova Scotia. It's a beautiful love story, but unfortunately, sculpting and I came together as the result of tragedy.

In 2004, just as my husband of 17 years was getting ready to retire, a deep depression settled in, and he took his own life. Bob had been a loyal, hardworking, devoted career and family man with a sunny outlook on life, so his sudden death came as a complete shock. My 16-year-old daughter, Priscilla, and I were initially left stunned and disoriented, but together we carried on.



From **ISABELLE FISH**:

When Priscilla spent her senior year of high school in an exchange program in France, I took the opportunity to spend some time in Paris. As I wandered around the magnificent city, I thought: *What am I going to do with the rest of my life?* I had just turned 50. As if that milestone birthday were a watershed moment, I had walked away from all my creative pursuits. Yet deep down, I knew there was one art form at which I still longed to try my hand.

I remembered the feeling of sinking my fingers into Play-Doh as a child, relishing the satisfaction of molding and shaping it. I had always gravitated toward tactile creativity. So, in Paris, I began to consider the possibility of learning to sculpt. I tucked the idea into the back of my mind and returned home. After selling off the horses and giving away the alpacas, the donkey, and the guinea hens, I rented out the farm and moved to Manhattan, where I enrolled in a lightweight sculpting class made up of wealthy New York women who wanted to fill their time with something enjoyable and not too intense.

I loved it, but unlike my glamorous classmates, I did not see sculpting as a hobby. I craved more than two days a week of instruction. *I have found my passion*, I thought, *but I need an institution that is much more accountable.*

That's when I saw an ad in a magazine for the Florence Academy of Art. That sparked something in me. I regretted not majoring in the fine arts in college. Might I now have a chance to start over again, in my fifties?

I applied to the academy, sent in a portfolio, and was accepted. Through friends of a friend, I located a place to live in Florence and prepared to move into my own little apartment in an Italian *palazzo*. Once settled in, I began, all alone, to

explore my new city. I felt simultaneously fearful and empowered as I went out for coffee on Saturday mornings. Little by little, I branched out. My confidence grew. I bought a clunky bicycle and, with a basket attached to both front and back, I pedaled my groceries and wine through the narrow city streets.

My fellow sculpting students, all in their mid-twenties, hailed from 10 different countries. English served as our common language, and though I regret never learning Italian, I was able to manage quite well without it. My classmates treated me like one of them. Just like me, they had all come to follow their passion and were paying their own way.



Every day, we sculpted and drew from live models. The program was unbelievably intense, but I loved every minute of it. I'd come to Italy with a notion of traveling on weekends, but soon laid that idea to rest, as the demands of the school were far too high. I gladly adapted to them. Every morning, seven days a week, my goal was to get to the studio and start working. I put in 60-hour weeks, and they flew by as I honed my skills and pursued my passion.

Those four years in Florence changed my life. When I left Italy, I knew I had the strength and ability to not only sculpt, but to also make my way through

life on my own, to take risks and embrace whatever came my way. I knew that I could be open-minded, open-hearted and open-armed to the challenges and the gifts put in my path.

As a young college graduate, I had dressed the human body. Now I had learned to uncover and expose it, celebrating its natural, unclothed beauty. I transitioned from cloth to clay! I emerged from the academy as a classical, traditional sculptor, working from life, creating in clay what I see in human flesh.

This art form feels powerful.



I take great satisfaction in building something out of nothing. My work is the exact opposite of Michelangelo, who chipped away at a solid marble block to form his pieces. I start from a rudimentary stick figure, then construct bone, muscle, sinew and flesh.

While studying in Italy, I spent summer breaks at my vacation home in Nova Scotia. During one of those summers, I met my current partner, John. We now live together in his magnificent home on a property called "Murder Point."

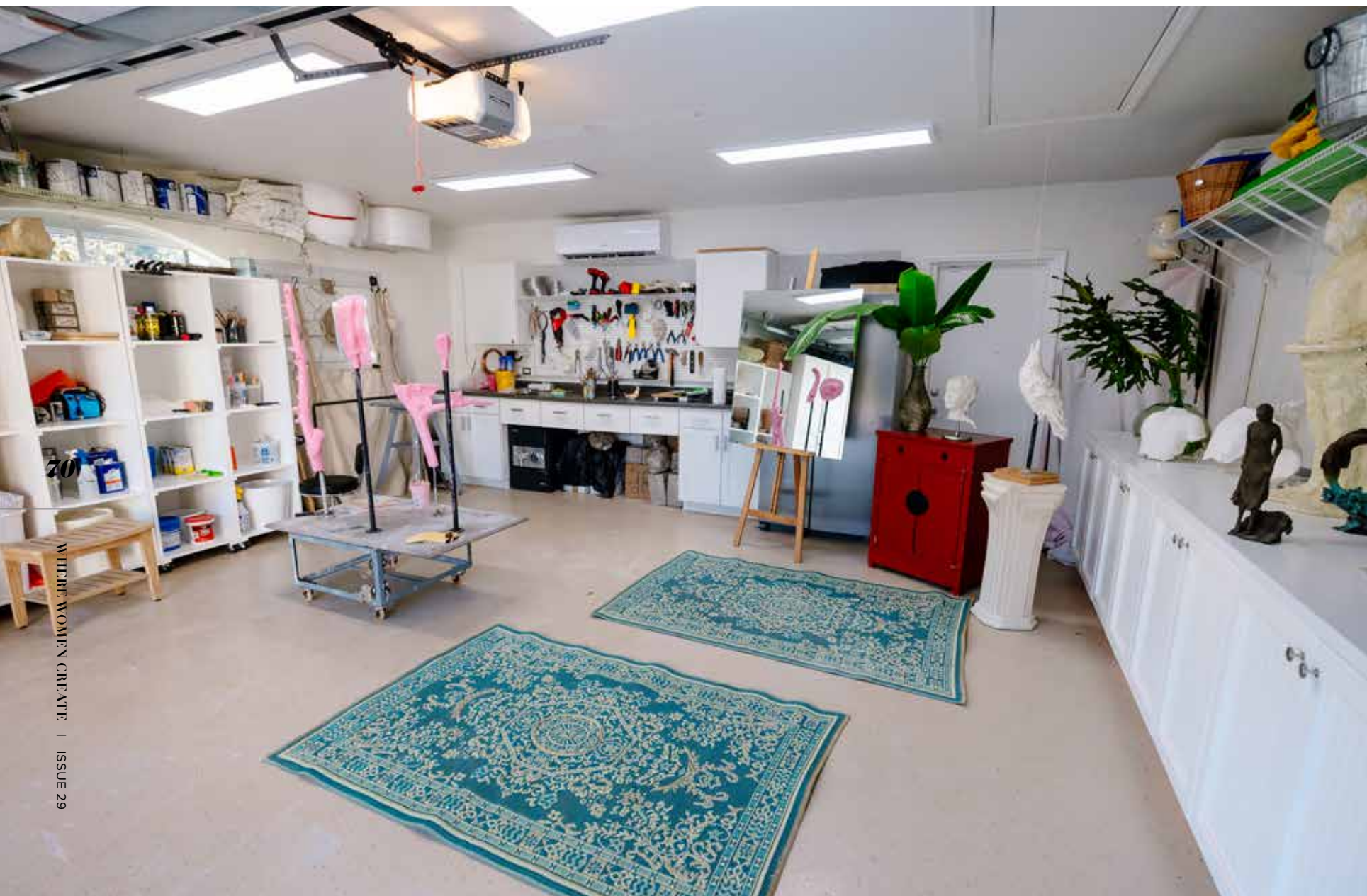
Amazingly and by complete coincidence, my parents happened to be good friends of the original owner of John's house. They regularly visited there when I was a child, and they spoke of it often. Since both my parents passed away decades ago, I take comfort in the fact that they, too, enjoyed this lovely home in which I now live. Another wonderful thing about the house is that my studio is not far away, in the center of the historic and picturesque seaside town of Lunenburg.

The Lunenburg foundry building is over a century old — an imposing brick structure in which ship bells, anchors and propellers were made once upon a time. When I learned that the foundry had been disbanded and sold, I approached the building's owner about possibly leasing space for a sculpting studio.

"You can have the foundry showroom," they said. My studio's location inspires me every day. Situated right beside the harbor, with a magnificent window that looks out onto the town, I feel connected to Lunenburg in a way I could never be in a more isolated setting. When I'm not listening to audiobooks as I sculpt, I can hear seagulls, ships' horns and the voices of excited tourists.

Cruise ships dock in Lunenburg, so I have customers from all over the world. I'm kept as busy as I want to be, with enough work to bring me into the studio every day, and still enough time to enjoy cooking and spending time with John on weekends and evenings.

John and I spend the winter months in Naples, Florida, so I have a satellite studio there (also known as a garage!). In Naples, I develop ideas for larger projects to be followed up on once I'm back in Lunenburg. The lovely thing about my Naples studio is that I can keep the large door open, so as I work, I soak in the glorious weather and fresh air. In Florida, because the studio is attached to our house, I have the freedom to work all hours of the day or night—whenever the mood strikes me.





My absolute favorite type of commission is bust portraiture. I'm constantly on the lookout for a fascinating face, a fabulous unique nose, chin, set of ears or lips. Sculpting a supermodel's face holds no interest for me. I look for models whose individuality shines in unusual features, bringing their own singular beauty to my art.

The motto of the famous 19th-century Rome sculpture schools of Canova and Thorvaldsen was "Clay is life, plaster is death, marble is the resurrection." Modern sculptors like me have for years adjusted that saying to something like: "We bring life to a piece in clay, death in plaster, and resurrection in bronze." This perfectly sums up the feeling I have when I fashion in clay, create a mold — albeit with wax instead of plaster — then see my piece returned to me in bronze.

It is, indeed, like witnessing a resurrection!

I'm fond of saying that I didn't learn how to sculpt in Florence. I learned how to see. That's what any young, emerging artist needs to learn — how to truly *see* what they are looking at. I'm grateful for my hard-won gift of sight, and I can't imagine better places to use that gift than my harbor studio in the heart of Lunenburg and my garage studio in sunny Florida.

i **More on Chippie**
www.chippiekennedy.com
Instagram: chippie_kennedy



Curator **ISABELLE FISH** is a craft ambassador and founder of The Club, by Rue Pigalle, a club for women patrons of craft. She shares: "I believe in the intrinsic value of manual intelligence, and in the important role that artisans play in their communities. Nurturing craftspeople helps create a kinder and more connected society." www.ruepigalle.ca