



## Artist's close brushes with the stars

A TALENTED ARTIST WHOSE WORKS INCLUDE A PORTRAIT OF HOLLYWOOD SUPERSTAR MICHAEL DOUGLAS AND THE KING OF SPAIN IS MAKING A NAME FOR HIMSELF ON MALLORCA. Text Sarah Farrell

If Frank Kruger had listened to the nuns at school, he could still be knee deep in elephant dung in the zoo. Instead, thanks to his determination and perhaps a closer ear to Him Upstairs, he is now carving out a very successful career as a painter. His admirers include no less than Michael Douglas after Frank was commissioned to paint his portrait for the official opening of the Costa Nord Foundation in Valldemossa, an organisation created to promote the landscape and culture of the Tramuntana mountains, where the top blockbuster actor has made his home for more than 20 years.

"He loved his painting, he was very friendly," says Frank, relaxing in the Bodeguita Bar and Restaurant overlooking the crystal waters at Cala Ratjada on Mallorca's eastern coast.

"I painted him as a man who is thinking about something. Behind him is part of the world which shows the Balearic islands. So it means he is thinking about what he could do for the Mallorcan foundation. That was the idea of the painting," explains Frank.

He says he found Michael Douglas and his wife Catherine Zeta Jones to be very warm and friendly people, despite their A-list celebrity status. With plenty of patience too, a characteristic which came in handy during the handover of Frank's large and heavy portrait of the actor.

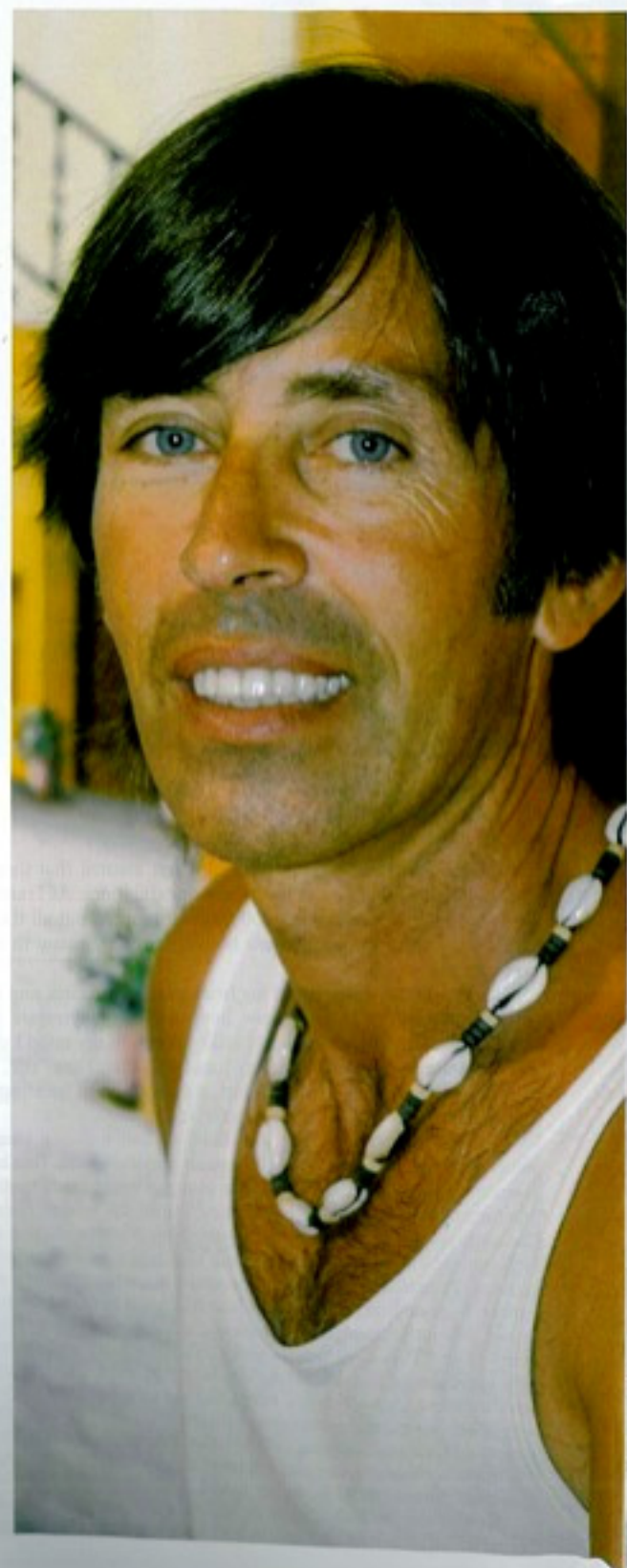
"Michael Douglas and myself were holding the picture while my friend took some photos with my camera. He didn't know how to use it and didn't know which button to press. We waited, kept smiling and the painting got heavier .... and heavier .... and heavier!"

Still Michael Douglas carried on smiling until finally, the flash popped and the picture was taken. Thankfully Frank's brushes with other personalities have run a little more smoothly. He has also painted the Spanish king, German football coach Rudi Voller and actors. But his talents also run to impressive landscapes, seascapes, still life, nudes and portraits. His distinctive style makes his work instantly recognisable, especially as many Mallorcan restaurants, including the Bodeguita Bar, are home to his paintings. His work can also be found in many 5-star hotels such as the Marriott and Sheraton chains, as well as exhibitions as far afield as Brazil and Frank's home city of Berlin.

Two years ago, he also held an exhibition at the Turin Winter Olympic games. At the end of the games, the paintings are auctioned with 100% of the money raised going to help sports people with disabilities. Frank's works raised 32,000 euros towards the cause. Now his gallery on the seafront at Cala Ratjada is proving popular with residents and tourists enjoying an evening stroll along the promenade. They walk past the candlelit restaurants and bars before being hit by the 6,000-watts of illumination to his gallery attracting art lovers like moths to a flame. They can pick up an original work, or scene which takes their fancy. They also have the privilege of being able to see Frank at work, painting on his terrace.

"I can hear people talking about my paintings, saying that they like them and that's like applause," he says.

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< page 85 Admirers of his work can also rest assured that there will always be something new in his gallery or exhibitions. As Frank says, he would have to live another 200 years or more to put all the ideas in his head on to canvas because he is inspired by many things he sees every day.

"It's like I have a camera in my head which goes click and I store all the impressions. I don't know how many gigabytes are in my head. 'Sometimes I am sleeping, I wake up and in my mind I start to paint. I paint in my mind so many times and then I say 'Yes', that's my picture. Then, with a pencil I start to draw. A lot of paintings start in my mind, many of them start in the night."

While we talk Frank takes my notepad and makes a couple of pencil sketches, depicting two of his most popular works. One is from the viewpoint of a motorist driving along a rural road, traditional Mallorcan, with a man and his donkey. But in the mirror, instead of the road behind them, you can see the New York landscape of tall skyscrapers. The second picture Frank sketches is of a man living in a grimy industrial city. He has a brochure showing Mallorca strewn on the floor and the wall behind him has been knocked through to reveal a beautiful landscape, which is a million miles away from his gritty reality. They say that every picture tells a story and, from these two examples of Frank's work, his paintings depict interesting but very different views. Frank's talent for art stems from a very early age. When his older brothers were still drawing stick figures, a three-year-old Frank was drawing people in motion in his kindergarten. As the son of a photographer and engineering designer, it was inevitable that their talents would be in his blood.

"One of the curious things in high school was that one of my favourite subjects was art but I had to leave the school before taking

the exam. At this time, the exam included a lot of history of art. I was being taught by Catholic nuns and I was like a rebel. I was a rebel so they said 'No' to the exam."

He had to find work and started a three-year apprenticeship in Berlin Zoo, leading to a professional qualification as a zookeeper. All this time, he felt compelled to keep painting, as if it was his destiny, his reason for being. His instinct for destiny, for what is right for him in his world, also carries through in his private life. One day, Frank met a young woman on the beach in Mallorca, they talked for a few minutes and he knew at once that she was The One. Within a week, her boyfriend at the time was history and today, she and Frank have a two-year-old daughter.

But life has not been plain sailing in Frank's quest to be an artist. "A lot of times my mother said 'You have to have a real job, you have to make some money'. I said, 'No, you will see.' Now I have reached a level of life and I don't have to be afraid of the next day. Sometimes it was the end of the month and I didn't have money. Some days I was hungry, I had no idea how to get through the next day, and then I sold a painting and I had enough money so I could live one or two months more.

"I am sure God was saying, 'You have to do this, this is your destiny. Every morning I thought that I had to find another job, and he said 'No'.

For Frank, it is still important for him to feel that hunger.

"To stay hungry, that's the motto of my life," he says. ■

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