

For Immediate Release

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“EMILE NORMAN – BY HIS OWN DESIGN,”

Inspiring Portrait of Iconoclastic California Artist,

to Air Nationally on PBS on Monday, June 23, 2008 at 10PM

“...not just a simple portrait of an artist but also a love story.”

- San Francisco Chronicle

“...an artistic history of post World War II America, and an eye-opener for anybody who’s never heard of this gifted creative mind.” - Orlando Sentinel

Winner of the HBO Audience Award at the 2007 Miami Gay & Lesbian Film Festival

EMILE NORMAN – BY HIS OWN DESIGN is a portrait of the self-taught California artist, Emile Norman, who, at age 90, is still working with the same passion for life, art, nature, and freedom that inspired him through seven decades of a changing art scene and turbulent times for a gay man in America. Directed by Will Parrinello and produced by Michael Tucker, Jill Eikenberry and Will Parrinello, **EMILE NORMAN – BY HIS OWN DESIGN** will air nationally on PBS on Monday, June 23, 2008 at 10PM (check local listings).

This insightful and affectionate portrait explores how Norman’s independent spirit developed from his early days on a walnut ranch in the San Gabriel Valley, brought him success in New York City in the 1940’s and 1950’s, and gave him the confidence to leave the New York art scene to find artistic and personal freedom in Big Sur. There, with Brooks Clement, his partner of 30 years, he built a house and created a haven for a circle of friends that is still vibrant today.

None of this came without struggle. From the beginning, Emile’s natural talent and love of art conflicted with the conventional ideas of his parents. His sexuality had to be hidden at a time when “gay” meant “sissy.” Emile’s work glittered in Bergdorf Goodman’s windows, on chorus girls’ headdresses Fred Astaire’s *Blue Skies*, and won rave reviews at New York City gallery shows, but even then he had to be portrayed as the macho “California rancher turned artist.” It wasn’t until Emile met Brooks Clement that, as long-

time friend, costume designer Willa Kim says: “He didn’t just *come* out of the closet, he *burst* out of the closet!”

In 1946, Emile and Brooks moved to Big Sur, an area extending from the Monterey Peninsula for 90 miles along the coast. Already established as an artists’ colony, Big Sur’s residents included poet Robinson Jeffers and author Henry Miller as the “leading prophets.” Others — like Edward Weston, Jack Kerouac and Lawrence Ferlinghetti — helped to shape the area’s mystique. There Emile and Brooks met Florence Pfeiffer, a generous benefactor who helped finance their purchase of a spectacular ridge-top spread overlooking the sea and the mountains.

Together, they built their own home by hand, a labor of love that serves as a tribute to their lives together and their many talents. Big Sur inspired Emile to create works that reflected their surrounding’s magnificent natural beauty.

Brooks told Emile, “You go into the studio and I’ll show the world what you’re doing.” And work he did, creating art in a wide variety of media, from small prints and sculptures to massive murals for many Bay Area homes, hotels, and public buildings. Brooks died of cancer in 1973, but their relationship continues to inspire a new generation. Jeff Mallory and C. Kevin Smith moved into an apartment that Emile built for them in his home. Together they have formed a family that will enable Emile to keep working in his studio until, as he says, “I get gathered in.”

Still working today, Emile is primarily creating playful wood inlay sculptures of animals. When asked which artists have influenced his work, Emile stops to think and answers emphatically, “Just one — Bach.” He still spends three weeks each summer in nearby Carmel, where he’s been a patron of the Bach Festival for the past fifty years.

EMILE NORMAN – BY HIS OWN DESIGN aired on KQED in October 2006 as part of the documentary series *Truly CA: Our State, Our Stories* and is distributed nationally to PBS through KQED.

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Will Parrinello (Director/Producer) has made award-winning documentaries for 20 years. His producing and directing credits include *Dreaming of Tibet*, an intimate portrait of three Tibetan exiles; *Global Focus – The New Environmentalists*, a series of half-hour films about grassroots environmental activists, hosted by Robert Redford, that aired on PBS and the Sundance Channel; *Little Italy*, an affectionate exploration of Italian American identity; *Compassion is the Key*, a look at the work of the American Himalayan Foundation and the feature length documentary *Kerouac*. Will shot and edited the P.O.V./ITVS production, *In the Light of Reverence* and was Director of Photography on

the Academy Award nominated documentary *Tell the Truth and Run: George Seldes and the American Press*.

Jill Eikenberry (Producer) is an award-winning actress, who has starred in numerous Broadway and off Broadway plays, feature films, and movies for television. She is best known for her portrayal of Anne Kelsey in NBC's hit series *L. A. Law*, for which she received 4 Emmy nominations, 3 Golden Globe nominations and a Golden Globe Award. Ms. Eikenberry produced the prime time NBC documentary, *Destined to Live* about the emotional effects of breast cancer for which she received The Humanitas Award.

Michael Tucker (Producer), best known for his portrayal of Stuart Markowitz in the hit TV series, *L.A. Law*, started his career in regional theater and then moved to New York where he appeared in numerous off-Broadway and Broadway plays. He then went on to a career in TV and film, where he received numerous Emmy and Golden Globe nominations. He and his wife, Jill Eikenberry, travel the country speaking on behalf of the fight against breast cancer. He received the "Good Guy" award from the National Women's Political Caucus for his work on women's health issues. His first book, *I Never Forget a Meal*, is a memoir based around good eating.

About the Genesis of the Film

Jill Eikenberry and her husband, Michael Tucker, are friends and neighbors of Emile Norman. The actors met Norman in 1991 when they bought land from him. At the time, Tucker says, "We were halfway into an eight-year commitment to (the TV series *L.A. Law*,) which can be frankly very deadening. They pay you a lot, but the quality of your work is very difficult to get excited about, and Emile reinvigorated our commitment to our art."

"We were blown away by his house and by his art and by who he was and by the (home's pipe) organ and by the surroundings," Eikenberry says. "But also what we noticed is that we started bringing friends to Emile's house -- I became the docent, showing everybody around and looking at the new pieces and every time we came, there were many new pieces."

Knowing that they wanted to share Emile's inspiration with others, they brought on director Will Parrinello to make the film. Says Parrinello, who was unfamiliar with Emile's work, "I thought I was setting out to make a film about an artist's process and his work. When I drove to the top of Pfeiffer Ridge in Big Sur and saw Emile's home and studio for the first time, I was intrigued. I learned that he and his partner of 30 years hand-crafted the house and almost everything in it. When I finally met Emile, I mentioned how moved I was by his art and its undeniable place in his home/studio. He told me that he and Brooks

created a house that reflected love. As an artist who loves what I do, I became convinced that I wanted to make a film about a man who had created a life of his own design, one where he could craft the art that appealed to him with complete freedom. With Michael and Jill, we ended up making a film about being true to one's vision in a world that often looks down on nonconformity."

Emile Norman (Subject) was born on April 22, 1918, in San Gabriel, California. His father was a walnut grower, and Emile grew up surrounded by mountains, rivers, and agriculture. As a young boy, he was already focused on making art, inspired by the nature around him and using whatever materials he could put his hands on. At age 16, he created a remarkable sculpture illustrating the myth of Prometheus, using concrete and the broken pieces of his father's beer bottles.

He lasted in art school one day, when his teacher told him he was doing the assignment "the wrong way." Very much self-motivated and self-directed, he soon became a commercial artist, producing window displays and working on the sets of Hollywood films. At the age of 25 he made his first trip to New York, where he displayed his innovative creations made of plastics, such as window shades, jewelry, dishes and screens. His jewelry was photographed in *Vogue*, and he produced window displays for Bergdorf Goodman, Bonwit Teller, and other department stores.

His first major show as a non-commercial artist was in 1951 at the Feingarten Gallery in New York, where his marble sculptures of animals and abstract organic shapes displayed his signature blend of meticulous detail and a generous, sweeping lyricism.

By this time he had met his life-partner, Brooks Clement. They met in Los Angeles in 1943 (Brooks had come to Emile's house to repair his stereo); in 1946, en route to look at some land in Mendocino, they stopped in Big Sur, where they saw a sign advertising property for sale. They never made it to Mendocino...

Brooks was instrumental in fashioning a highly successful career for Emile, allowing him to focus entirely on his artwork, while he took care of managing all the financial, organizational, and administrative details. They opened what became a very successful gallery in Carmel.

Emile's largest commission ever was for a 38-foot-tall by 48-foot-wide, decorative mural window for the Masonic Memorial Temple in San Francisco. He also created outdoor sculptures for the temple. His time in Italy, working on these pieces, was a major turning point in his artistic evolution, for it was there that he discovered what was then called "German Mastic," a.k.a. epoxy. With epoxy, he entered a new phase as a sculptor of increasingly fantastic, colorful, and imaginative sculptures. Emile has used many other

materials in the creation of his art: fabric, earth, shells, bronze, printing press and, even at 90, he's not yet finished discovering and innovating.

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