

Artist turns history on its head

Christy Gast revisits the story of the Barefoot Mailman by burying it.



Performance artist and sculptor Christy Gast will discuss her Bal Harbour public-art installation “Self Portrait As the Barefoot Mailman” this Thursday at Books and Books in Bal Harbour. (Simon Hare/Courtesy / May 15, 2013)

Buried headfirst in a bed of flowers and mulch across the street from Bal Harbour Shops is a 12-foot-tall sculpture of the Barefoot Mailman, a historical figure who hand-delivered mail sans shoes along the beach between Lake Worth and Miami during the 1880s.

And he — or, in this case, she — is buried headfirst because artist Christy Gast intended it that way. The fiberglass sculpture, titled “Self Portrait As the Barefoot Mailman,” has a faded, faux-bronze sheen and uses Gast as the model in 19th century cloth. So if the sculpture resembles a beloved monument that was sucked up and spit out a long time ago by a rampaging hurricane, well, that’s the point.

“I was fascinated with the romantic notion of a guy delivering mail along the beach, because there weren’t access to any roads,” says the Miami performance artist and sculptor, who will discuss the Barefoot Mailman during a Thursday art talk at the Bal Harbour Books and Books with Thom Collins, director of the soon-to-be-rechristened Perez Art Museum Miami.

Gast is no stranger to injecting herself into performance-art videos that intersect art with bizarre historical footnotes. In 2010, she filmed herself tap-dancing in a tuxedo around Lake Okeechobee after reading about Everglades restoration (she called the video piece “Herbert Hoover Dyke,” pun very much intended).

“But if I just had a sculpture that looked like something you’d find in Paris, it wouldn’t look contemporary,” she says. “So I decided to turn it upside-down, literally, and people will wonder, ‘Was there a storm? What is it even commemorating? What are they saying? Was it destroyed?’ “

Christy Gast’s art talk with Thom Collins will take place 7 p.m. Thursday, May 16, at Books and Books in Bal Harbour (9700 Collins Ave). Admission is free. Call 305-864-4241 or go to BooksAndBooks.com.