

A Bust for Richard Nixon

By Vera Glaser

Washington

A larger-than-life bust of Richard Nixon is nearing completion across the Potomac in an old torpedo factory, in the studio of sculptor Jimilu Mason. A sneak preview shows it to be a benign likeness.

The only other known existing Nixon bust was tagged "gruesome" by Julie Nixon Eisenhower when she first saw it. By Gualberto Rocchi, it cost the U.S. Senate about \$5000 and was said by a Nixon aide to resemble "a supercilious Eagle Scout."

In 1969, by order of the White House, the Rocchi work was wrapped in muslin and stashed in a basement crypt in the Capitol, where it remains to this day.

Likenesses of high officials are touchy. Personal vanity is involved.

The former President could be expected to view Miss Mason's sympathetic treatment as suitable for the official National Portrait Gallery here, but to be eligible, the bust must be done "from life."

Miss Mason, a respected sculptress who has done heads of Presidents Truman, Kennedy, and more than a score of congressmen, did Nixon from photographs. But she has requested a sitting with him and awaits a visit from Rose Mary Woods, Nixon's long-time aide, who has been invited to inspect the bust. Snapshots of it have been sent to San Clemente.

What gets into the prestigious National Portrait Gallery is not always controllable. Peter Hurd's oil painting of Lyndon Johnson, called "the ugliest thing I ever saw" by the late President, now hangs there for millions of tourists to see.

A bronze bust of Harry Truman, which daughter Margaret pronounces "dreadful," sits in President Ford's oval office. The unsigned Truman bust has been around the mansion since Eisenhower's day, and so far no one has been able to track down the sculptor's identity.

"The idiot left his glasses off and the nose isn't right. It doesn't look like Dad," Margaret Truman Daniel snapped.

Sculptor Mason is the

daughter of Lowell Mason, a Federal Trade Commissioner during the Truman Administration. Her full-length statue of Lyndon Johnson stands in the LBJ Memorial Park at Stonewall, Texas.

"She calls the Nixon bust 'very spontaneous. It has a lot of life. It won't offend his friends or enemies.'" A former aide describes Nixon, while President, as "very, very sticky" about sittings. "Guys like Haldeman were always after him to have a portrait or bust made but the boss didn't want to sit still that long," the source said.

More recently, Nixon's daughter Julie is said to have urged him to sit for a portrait.

Since 1885 the U.S. Senate has been ordering busts of vice presidents to display in niches around the Senate chamber and adjacent corridors.

In the '60s while Nixon was practicing law, they commissioned the bust by Rocchi, an Italian. Nixon had selected Rocchi, who came well recommended after doing heads of Barry Goldwater, Nelson Rockefeller and the Shah of Iran.



Jimilu Mason sculpted Nixon's bust from photographs but has also requested a sitting from him.