

Body Work

Trina Merry elevates the human form

By Chris Koseluk

For most of us, standing in front of an arena full of people, wearing just our underwear, sounds like a nightmare. For Trina Merry, it was a life-changing event.

A Seattle native, Merry earned a BA in film at Azusa Pacific University in California, then headed off to Hollywood. After working in the art department on such films as *Fun With Dick and Jane*, she joined Yamaha Entertainment Group's artist relations division. She signed The Dresden Dolls and was invited backstage during one of the band's San Francisco appearances. The opening act was Australian band The Red Paintings, whose set featured body painting. After some urging, Merry agreed to strip down and get painted as the band played.

"I would say it was one of the sexiest, most exhilarating experiences of my life up to that point," says Merry.

Inigorated, she picked up a brush and began creating her own pieces. For two months, Merry juggled her day job with body painting at night. After losing too much sleep, she decided to body paint full-time. This was 2006, and Merry hasn't looked back since. She apprenticed under renowned body painter Craig Tracy and is now in San Francisco running Art Alive Gallery, a body-paint installation and performance troupe.

"It does what other visual art forms have trouble accomplishing," explains Merry. "It's the most human. I'm painting on a human being that has needs. You have to be attentive to them as well as them being attentive to you. It's this really intimate experience."

Merry considers herself primarily a fine-art body painter, and most of her creations are gallery pieces. But she isn't opposed to taking assignments on commission and has worked her magic for *Rolling Stone* and Bud Light, among others. Her *Human Motorcycles* for The Progressive International Motorcycle Show has made her a viral sensation.

"I'm excited about it as an art form," says Merry. "I'm also excited about how make-up can blur the lines with body paint. Some of my best assistants are make-up artists. I urge them all to learn as much as they can about other forms of painting and to get out there and try it."

Here, Merry shares the back story on her work.





Body paint: Trina Merry

Photographer: Juan Moreno,

assisted by Holland Horvacki and Angela Taylor

Models: Erin Bates, Julian, Morgane Rosenthal,

Jackie Bartlett, Clara McLenore, Lana Baumgartner,

Geandolyn Withrow, Kerstin Tuning

Hair and make-up: Sandra Moreno

Body-painting assistants: Gina Mello, Melissa

Huffman, Rachel Levine, Sandra Moreno



Acting: Trina Merry works on Erin Bates. Right: Models practice poses, Merry at work.



Human Motorcycles

The Progressive International Motorcycle Show approached Merry to create a series to promote its 2012 season. Ultimately, she and her team created a sport bike, a dirt bike and a cruiser completely out of human forms. The first, including rider Erin Bates (a real-life Supercross rider), featured six models. The latter two were composed of seven models each, plus Bates.

"It was just this giant cluster of human flesh and sweat and muscles and paint and determination," says Merry.

But she wasn't quite sure where to begin. A series of initial sketches, including the one she received from the ad agency that she describes as "really hilarious," didn't provide much insight. Next, she tried breaking down a motorcycle to see if its individual parts were shaped like people. That didn't help either. Clearly, there was only one way to see if this could work.

"I didn't know if these people in these body shapes existed. I didn't know if they could hold these positions. I didn't know if they could do this and have other people on top of them," she remembers thinking. "I needed to get some people into the room."

Merry contacted her most flexible models. She put the word out to yoga and dance pros and circus schools. Attitude was just as important. It had to be a diva-free shoot.

"It was one of those circumstances that I had to say, 'OK, who are my athletes? Who are the people who can work together as a team and stay positive all day long? Who are my performers?'" explains Merry.

The motorcycle wheels seemed the logical place to

start. "Nothing else is going to make sense if we don't have a strong wheel," she reasoned. The first hour all the team did was make wheel shapes until they hit upon something they liked. The joke in the studio was that they were reinventing the wheel.

The painting sessions were long and arduous: 18 hours for the sports bike, 15 for the cruiser and more than 13 for the dirt bike. One model cried. Another lost most of the feeling in one of her legs. The model whose leg formed the exhaust pipe on the cruiser could only hold that position for about 10 to 30 seconds at a time. Merry learned to paint fast and break often.

"We'd do it like reps in the gym," says Merry. "I'd tell them we'd do six strong minutes in the pose where I could paint them. Then we'd take two to five minutes out of the pose to rest."

The team actually developed a code. "We were using 'yellow light, red light' for a while," Merry continues. "Yellow means, 'I have to rest in the pose, but nobody needs to get out of it.' And red was, 'Everybody get off, I'm going to die.'"

Keeping the mood light and fun also helped. "We would just do a bunch of silly things throughout the day to keep everybody connected because it was such hard work," says Merry. "When things would get tough, everyone would just say, 'YOLO: you only live once. This is your one chance to be a human motorcycle.'"



See more of Trina Merry's work in *Make-Up Artist's* digital edition on your Android or iPad tablet. Go to makeupmag.com/digital for details.