



The Actor® – A Work of Art Celebrating Artistry

He's not yet dressed and holds the masks of comedy and tragedy, contemplating which persona he will assume when he steps in front of the camera. He's 16 inches tall, but notoriously heavy. And most actors would give their eyeteeth to take all 12 pounds of him home.

Twenty years ago, The Actor® was sculpted by Edward Saenz and designed by Jim Heimann and Jim Barnett. Since then, it has been the task of the American Fine Arts Foundry in Burbank to create the celebrated statuettes for the Screen Actors Guild Awards®.

Under the supervision of Brett Barney and Angel Meza, a team of 10 crafts people labor over a period of three to four weeks each year to produce the distinctive awards that have become so instantly identifiable with the show.

The lost-wax process is an exacting one. The artists start with a mother mold, which is made of silicon. From this mold, they then create the wax. Unfortunately for The Actor, he doesn't begin his journey into the world with any arms. To create his famously reflective pose, the arms are attached separately since in this complicated process the arms might break off when the wax is pulled from the mold. When fully configured in wax, the statuette still weighs 10 times less than it will in bronze, not including the base, which approximately doubles the weight.

The wax figurine has to be flawless in order to maintain the integrity of the final product. From there, the wax gets treated with ceramic material to create a casting mold that's going to hold the molten bronze inside. When the metal gets inside the ceramic mold, it is left to solidify for a few hours.

Once the metal sets, the mold is broken. That allows the foundry crafts people to develop the image. The process involves sandblasting, tooling, grinding, polishing and metal chasing. The distinctive blue-green patina is achieved through chemical oxidation, a natural process that can be sped up with a blowtorch.

After the base is added, which has a diameter of 4 inches and a circumference of 13 inches, and a final quality control check is complete, each statuette gets a stamp with a unique serial number. SAG-AFTRA will not know how many Actor statuettes it will hand out until the awards presenters open the envelopes on Saturday, Jan. 18, 2014. Though the number of categories and special awards is known ahead of time, the possibility of multiple recipients sharing awards in the Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture, Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Drama Series and Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Comedy Series categories makes the total number of statuettes that will be awarded unpredictable. Any surplus Actor statuettes will find a home in the SAG-AFTRA vault until next year.

To date, the Foundry has produced 832 Actor statuettes, each nearly identical and yet each an individual work of art. The first statuette cast is on display at SAG-AFTRA headquarters in Los Angeles, and 823 statuettes have been awarded since the first Actors were presented in 1995.

