



Artist Albert Jackson, whose customers include The Supremes and Tom Cruise



'Your city is my inspiration'

Californian artist Albert Jackson tells **Jo Ind** how the buzz of Birmingham has helped his creativity

He has swapped temperatures of 80°F for 40°F and views of the Pacific ocean for Digbeth bus station, but Albert Jackson has found a creative energy in Birmingham that is exciting him more than his native LA.

The 40-year-old Californian painter and sculptor, who counts The Supremes and Tom Cruise among his clients, came to work in The Custard Factory in Digbeth four months ago because he has close friends in the city.

Next week he is putting on his first UK show "On Canvas and In Steel" at The Custard Factory, which he is finding an inspiring place to work.

"The building has excellent energy and atmosphere which provides the perfect environment for me to create," he said.

"I have found it hard to adjust to the weather in Britain. In California 60°F is cold so that has been hard for me to get used to.

"But there's a really different attitude and atmosphere in Britain which is great. I love the way it's so green, even in winter.

"I've joined a gym and found that everybody talks to each other. In LA people have their personal stereotypes on and it's seen as a very individual thing. You don't get a sense of community.

"I like the contrast between the cities and the countryside. We don't really get that where I come from and I didn't expect the architecture here to be so daring. I like the mixing of the old and new. Where I come from when something's old they rip it down and build



something else. Being in a different environment has been really comfortably creative."

A multi-dimensional artist, fluent in a wide variety of mediums, Albert produces paintings and sculptures influenced by Greek and Native American mythology, ancient astrology and Jungian psychology.

His work has been highly acclaimed in the United States where he has had showings and exhibitions from Los Angeles to New York.

Each of his pieces - which range in size from eight feet to 14 inches - starts as a fully formed vision in his mind before he begins work.

Then he welds, hammers, forges and torch-carves raw materials such as steel iron, copper and wood into fluid but functional artworks that have immediate impact as well as a lasting poetic resonance: a steel sculpture of a woman carved from a single piece of metal, gleaming with fierce independence and eroticism; a chair with the wings of a butterfly, a glass table with the colours of autumn leaves beneath its surface.

Albert's early childhood was spent on the move throughout Germany and the United States as his father was in the military.

His talent for painting and sculpture was evident from childhood when he won several art competitions but he didn't consider art a viable career choice assuming he wouldn't be able to make a living from it.

He went on to study photography, philosophy, theology, political and computer science at the University of Colorado and began a career in computers followed by a spell in advertising when he worked as an art director.

It was a return visit to Europe in the mid 1980s that inspired him back to his original love, art.

On a trip to Paris, the sight of the Eiffel Tower had a profound effect on him - its enormity and complexity as a single steel structure was to revive his passion for sculpture.

On returning to the States, he set up his own business making steel furniture for large companies and department stores. This evolved gradually into a full time commitment to his art work and he set up a permanent studio in Long Beach, Los Angeles.

His work has been shown in New York, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Las Vegas and Toronto.

Albert was honoured to be chosen to exhibit his work as featured artist at the New York International Film Festival.

● On Canvas and In Steel is at The Gallery, The Custard Factory, Gibb Street, Digbeth, Birmingham from May 15-21.