

# Obituaries

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Michael Myers with *The Perfect Game*, depicting Canadian Cliff Thorburn's historic perfect score during the 1985 world snooker championships.

**MICHAEL MYERS, 71** PAINTER, SCULPTOR, PRODUCER, FILMMAKER

## Renaissance man went where inspiration took him

A rock-video pioneer, British-born artist was captivated by snooker and the 'bodgers' of his youth



As a painter, sculptor, furniture maker, filmmaker and writer, Michael Myers was a Renaissance man who invited the spirit of play into whatever he was working on. Whether with woodworkers in the woods of Buckinghamshire, at a barbecue on a frozen Lake Simcoe, or watching a well-played snooker game, he was adept at finding the extraordinary in the world around him.

According to British filmmaker Mike Hodges, "[Myers] was quite happy to be a provocateur, to be a stimulator. I don't think I ever heard him talking about money or achievement. He just enjoyed the process of thinking."

Myers spent his boyhood in the woods behind his home in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. "I liked nothing better than to sit with the bodgers," he said, "those skilled artisans with magic in their fingers who worked in makeshift shacks in the woods, making their old chair parts."

Bodgers were itinerant woodworkers who carved from beech, ash, oak and elm trees on the chalk hills of the Chilterns. Since their equipment was simple to move and set up, it was easier for them to work from the source of the timber than to transport heavy logs to a workshop.

"My neighbours were cabinet-makers, chair-makers, and upholsterers," Myers said.

Sixty years later, Myers was still captured by the magic of the woods. As a filmmaker and visual artist, he returned to High Wycombe in 2005 with an exhibition called *Joints*. In a dozen outdoor sculptures, he followed centuries-old patterns exposing the normally hidden anatomy of common joints used in furniture.

Described by some as a Hobbit and by others as an Ariel-like figure, with his frequent flights of fancy and imaginative mind, Myers had an eclectic mix of talents.

In 1970, he filmed the iconic Isle of Wight music festival that featured Jimi Hendrix and Jim Morrison. He also filmed Santana's first European tour, and was a pioneer of the now ubiquitous rock-video format.

Myers died Dec. 10 in Toronto



A chair, inspired by the bodgers.

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**Mike Hodges**  
Filmmaker

from lung cancer. He was 71.

Born in 1939, he lived with his family in London until their home was bombed by the Germans. His father, Ernest Myers, ran a barbershop that was also bombed. His mother, Hilda, was the soul of optimism during a time when it was in need. The family was homeless for a while, then moved to High Wycombe, to become one of 10 Jewish families living there. Ernest cut hair at the RAF base and was a volunteer firefighter on weekends.

Mike was left on his own to befriend the bodgers and study culture at his grandmother's knee – listening to opera and reading books became their frequent afternoon activities.

In 1959, he attended the High Wycombe College of Art & Technology specializing in furniture design. He then accepted a scholarship to the Royal College of Art in London. He graduated in 1964 and, after a few years re-

searching arts and news shows for ABC TV and Thames Television, he co-founded Tattooist International, a London-based film production company.

Around this time he started making what came to be known as rock-videos, taking hit parade recordings from a BBC program called *Top of the Pop* and adding visuals to the voice recordings.

Moving further into the music scene, Myers filmed the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival. "The bands played all night and day for 10 days," said his wife, Toni Myers, who worked as his film editor. "And the only bands who weren't there were Dylan and the Beatles and the Rolling Stones."

That left the likes of Jimi Hendrix, the Doors, Joni Mitchell, the Moody Blues, and the Who as part of the impressive lineup of performers. Meanwhile, John and Yoko were somewhere in the audience, perhaps near Elton John, who also paid for a ticket.

After filming Santana's European tour, he lived with the band in Marin County, Calif., while finishing the project.

He then filmed an unorthodox BBC production called *Buskers*, featuring what Toni calls "all kinds of crazy people."

In 1973, Myers came to Ontario to join his Canadian-born wife and infant son. On an earlier visit, one of the first things Toni had done was take him for a barbecue – in January, on a frozen Lake Simcoe. That's all it took: He fell instantly in love. "Mike couldn't believe he was walking on ice! It's so magical out there in the winter," she said.

Shortly after arriving, Myers took a job as producer on two consecutive shows at TVOntario. The first was *Ferguson Short & Ross*, with Max Ferguson, Martin Short and Mary Kay Ross. It was a series of documentaries about life in Canada as seen through its artists, musicians, historians and writers.

This series was followed by the popular *Behind the Shield*, featuring documentaries about Ontario's Canadian Shield.

His *pièce de résistance* was a series of recent paintings depicting world championship snooker games, with every move played out in sequence on life-size canvases. In 2006, he completed a 13-by-7-foot painting called *The*

*Perfect Game*. The painting depicts Canadian Cliff Thorburn's historic perfect score during the 1985 world championships. It was unveiled during the 2006 championships in Sheffield, U.K., and featured prominently in the BBC's live coverage of that year's meet.

Myers's father had been something of a local snooker hero in Southeast England – who wouldn't allow his son to play the game. Myers, who years later concluded that snooker is to Europe what hockey is to Canada, wanted in.

First, he got hold of all the BBC tapes from Thorburn's historic match, specifically the high overhead view, which was on a slight angle. Then he made hundreds of stills of this high angle looking down on the table, a single frame for each shot, and as the ball moved, as it hit another ball, he followed exactly where that ball wound up. He covered each of these frames with a grid and then approximated the distances, calculated the slight angle that the camera was at, and then turned it into a straight perpendicular view.

After doing several paper mockups of the game, he met with Thorburn in Toronto. "He explained how it would work, and Cliff was bemused, perhaps finding it a little difficult to picture the finished work," Toni said.

It took the better part of a year to do. Today, it hangs in the Hotel Mercure, next door to the Crucible in Sheffield, where the championships are held.

Myers's final projects were a collection of paintings depicting the dire consequences of urban sprawl, both in the U.K. and Canada.

"Over the last several years my painting has chronicled the corrosive effects on the landscape of unfettered urban sprawl and unregulated industrial development," Myers wrote in an artist's statement. "By using the language of contemporary art practice, this is my way of getting involved as a painter in one of the most politically and socially contentious issues of our time."

Myers leaves his wife, Toni (Trow), his children Micki and Jackson and his grandchildren Lucia, Javier and Lola.

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