

Cultural amalgam-the inspired art of Dave Tourjé

By: Annie Wharton, gallerist/curator



Picture this: It's 1978 and you're driving down York Boulevard in Highland Park, California. It's July, the desert-like heat is nearly 98 degrees, and Rodney on the 'Roq is introducing The Buzzcocks on the FM radio you just purchased new speakers for. You roll the windows all the way down, take another hit off that Marlboro (or is it a joint?), and push the accelerator on your orange-red 1969 GTO Judge down with force. In the distance you see an old ice cream truck decorated with hand-painted cones, an old woman carrying a bag of lemons, a construction site, a sexy young thing holding a giant boombox that, as you get closer, blasts out "Brick House" by The Commodores. And there's a little girl with braided hair sitting on her parents' concrete front steps wearing a bright green dress, holding a chihuahua, also wearing a bright green dress. All the while you are convinced that you're headed somewhere interesting, but not exactly sure where you'll end up. It is on this sort of journey where the work of Dave Tourjé takes its viewers.

Tourjé is an L.A. native whose amalgam of multi-cultural inspiration is called upon in his artistic production. He grew up in the gang-riddled Northeast L.A./Highland Park area, where gang members were called The Avenues and their thug mentality prevailed. The time he spent as an extreme sports enthusiast (he was an early arrival to vertical skateboarding, snowboarding, and an avid surfer) made him fast on his feet and able to fluidly negotiate difficult terrain. Living briefly in Mexico City while very young found him drinking in the work of great muralists- the legacy of artists like Diego Rivera and David Siqueiros sated his

penchant for art made "for the people." And his musical background as a player in the post-punk band The Dissidents added an unpredictable, almost irreverent tone, albeit a populist one.



Dave Tourjé and John Van Hamersveld at Gregory Way Gallery in Beverly Hills

His use of quotidian materials like Plexiglas and found driftwood, and the incorporation of bright colors and primitive forms, speak to a paradoxical nature that is further exemplified in his professions as both an artist and the owner of a concrete construction firm. It is through these divergent yet ultimately related roles as artist and artisan that Tourjé brings a certain dichotomy of complicated simplicity. But it is difficult to codify or pigeon-hole his art stylistically, because his capricious work lithely fluctuates between his organic assemblages of found material and the slick acrylic glass painting, for which he's becoming recognize. Using a reverse glass painting technique that refers to a master craft technique often associated with the Italian Murano glass style, Tourjé updates the process with synthetic materials utilized in the making of his copious large-scale paintings, such as Terminal Elevation Principle Vol. 2, and Ride Ride Ride (The Wild Surf), wherein each piece extols direct references to Los Angeles' pervasive surf culture. These works stand in direct opposition to his untitled driftwood and detritus sculptures, which seemingly juxtapose things discovered on a walk on the beach with elements found on L.A.'s gritty streets. Yet both modalities of work reflect a uniquely Southern California experience-- and Tourjé's work is just that. Constantly drifting with a playful insouciance-- whether on land or on the water-- his is a mutable practice that oscillates between form and idea, all the while maintaining strong roots steeped in Angeleno culture.

Annie Wharton

Annie Wharton owns Annie Wharton Los Angeles (www.anniewhartonlosangeles.com), a contemporary art gallery located in the Pacific Design Center in West Hollywood, CA. Wharton has written art criticism for Flash Art, OC Weekly, and Artlurker (where she served as West Coast Editor and video art critic). She has curated projects, exhibitions, and video screenings for more than a hundred artists, including Skip Arnold, Lynda Benglis, Jen DeNike, Kate Gilmore, Aaron GM, Ann Hamilton, Annika Larsson, Dafna Maimon, Shana Moulton, Yvonne Rainer, Pipilotti Rist, and Bruce Yonemoto. She is currently curating video art screenings to be shown at the American Academy in Rome in July and the Santa Barbara Contemporary Art Forum in August, as well as a video art exhibition that opens in April, 2012 at the Frost Museum in Miami. ■