

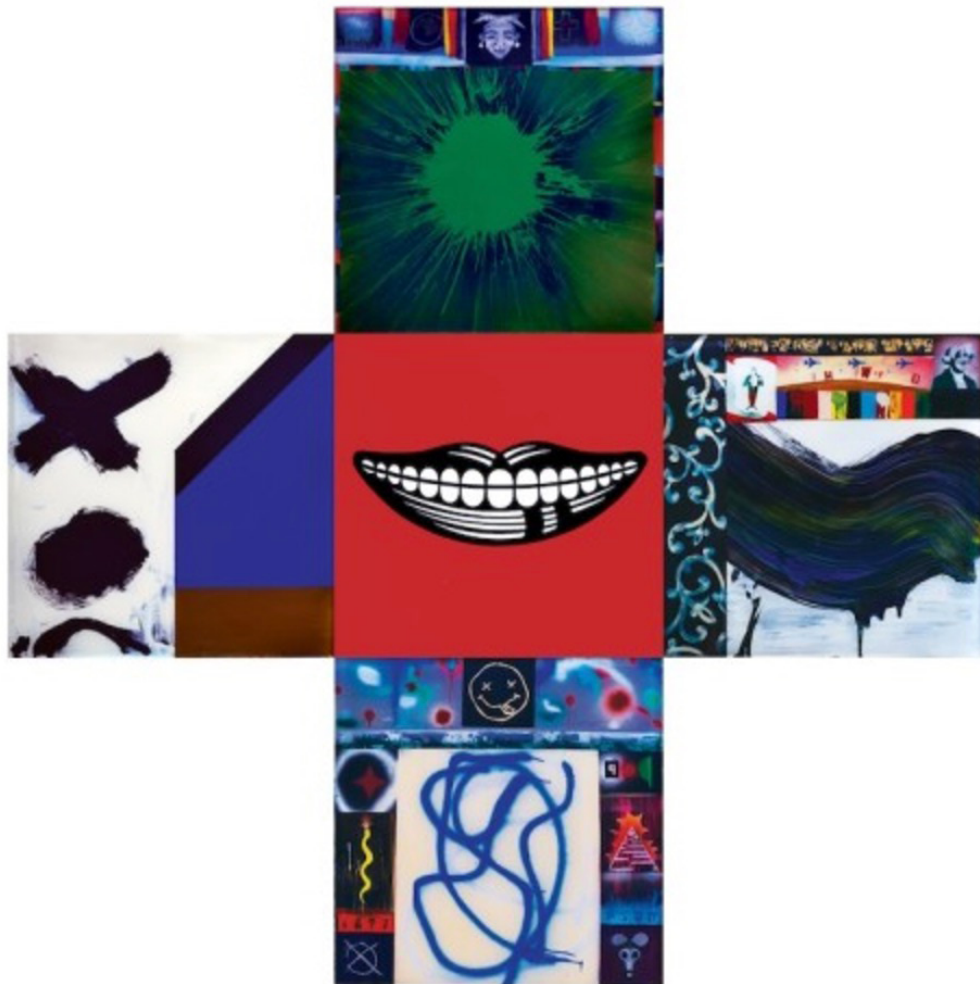
ARTLURKER

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POP COLOR CORRECTION: THE ARTWORK OF DAVE TOURJÉ

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Mary Anna Pomonis is an artist and a writer based in Los Angeles. In the series Viewfinder, Pomonis explores in depth one work of art in collaboration with the maker. Pulling directly from quotes by the artist, Pomonis interprets both the artists' words and the product of their creative process.



POP by Dave Tourjé

To color correct a photograph is to re-register the colors in the image from a new center, a new scale, and a new world. Pop art had a color and it was white: it was also male and from New York. In Dave Tourjé's new large-scale piece, *POP*, Tourjé corrects the color of the story of pop art, inserting his own left coast, multi-cultural take on the movement.

Tourjé's own heritage is multi-cultural; his mother is from Mexico City and he was born in the Northeast Los Angeles neighborhood of Glassell Park. Tourjé has seen the iconic imagery of Modernism and Post-Modernism appropriate freely from both Native culture and the history of art in Los Angeles. Because of Tourjé's connection to his heritage and the city of Los Angeles, his newest works are uniquely positioned to begin a conversation about cultural gaps that exist within the general art historical narrative.

The compositional form of the piece, *POP*, is that of a textile pattern cross. The simplicity of the colors—cherry red, kelly green, black, and white—are used to create rhythm and movement through the strong use of contrast. The central panel of the piece quotes directly from the *Johnny Face* billboard image (circa 1970), designed by the graphic artist John Van Hamersveld. Tourjé explains:

"I chose the mouth from John Van Hamersveld's *Johnny Face* as the central symbol. The work starts at the top with the depiction of a Pre-Colombian sculpture and then explodes with the green. From left to right, the panel moves from abstract gestural markings, evoking Emerson Woelffer, into a Helen Lundberg-inspired hard edge piece as it moves laterally across to the mouth."

The teeth grimace in both anger and joy, like the Pre-Columbian mask hovering in the panel above. Here, the teeth are a graphic representation, abstracted and still iconic. It's impossible to imagine Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* without his exposure to the African masks on display at the Palais du Trocadéro in Paris. Similarly, it is hard to imagine Van Hamersveld creating an image of the *Johnny Face* without, on some level, absorbing the tradition of Pre-Columbian imagery so well represented in the museum collections of Los Angeles at the time. Tourjé's work draws us to these historical omissions and mixes. His piece, *POP*, seems to suggest that the *Johnny Face* mouth sits at the intersection of these two powerful cultural influences: pre-Columbian and pop art.

Van Hamersveld, along with many of the West Coast artists of the pop era, have been essentially left out of the narrative history of pop art in favor of artists like Warhol and Rauschenberg. In the right panel of *POP*, Tourjé stencils the image of Edward Keinholz's sculpture, *Walter Hopps Hopps Hopps*, and frames it within a Warhol Brillo Box. Like a man trapped by his own desire to be wanted, Keinholz opens Hopps' jacket to expose him, only to have the whole endeavor confined and sanitized within Warhol's Brillo Box.

The Brillo cleaning product also alludes to the omission of West Coast icons in the California art scene, such as Keinholz, Foulkes, Berman, Lundberg, Woeffler and Van Hamersveld, from the discourse of modern art in the 20th century.

Tourjé's collision of the two interpretations of pop art calls attention to the corporatized packaging, selling, and reselling of the version solely centered on New York. In truth, the primary pop art images, such as Warhol's *Mickey Mouse* and *Marilyn Monroe*, are actually popular culture images emanating from Los Angeles and appropriated by pop artists. Tourjé's Mickey, derived from an influential Llyn Foulkes series, sits atop a stencil-tagged George Washington, sticking out a serpentine tongue and emerging victorious over the corporatization of pop art as symbolized by Washington.

The dark silhouetted figures in *POP* float atop sunset-like backdrops of solid color. Tourjé's use of spray paint in the piece actively refers to the traditions of West Coast graffiti, punk, and surf/skate aesthetics; movements inspired by the ocean and weather while committed to DIY sensibilities of art and culture. Tourjé explains:

"Growing up as an artist in Los Angeles, you were faced with the New York and Eurocentric 'fact' that L.A. was perceived to be a cultural backwater, provincial, and hollow. The defilement of the image of Mickey Mouse via my rat skull and the use of Llyn Foulkes' image, as well as the depicted bombing of the Hollywood sign, can be construed as the destruction or abolishing of the idea that the only culture in L.A. was Disneyland and Hollywood. Los Angeles does, in fact, have a deep cultural legacy."

Tourjé sets the record straight, standing up not only for the surface of West Coast pop, but the structure of its very existence. POP serves as a visual reminder of the cultural intersection Southern California represents historically, and how this interaction emanated out from Los Angeles and moved to affect popular culture around the world[.]

This post was contributed by Mary Anna Pomonis.