

Dave Tourjé: LA Aboriginal



Terminal Elevation Principle Vol. 2, 2011, acrylic, spray paint, gold leaf on acrylic glass, 108" x 108"

Tourjé's work is a vivid, cross-cultural hybrid referencing some of the now-thriving urban scenes spawned from the Los Angeles of the 1970's. Using bright colors and slick surfaces, his artwork is an amalgam of emblems expressing the unique dissonance and polyrhythmic tempo of the City of Angels.

Raised in North East L.A./Highland Park in the 70s, back when The Avenues gangs ruled the turf, Tourjé spent his youth immersed in the then-burgeoning subcultures that have become a vital part of our contemporary vernacular – the skate, surf, snowboarding, and punk scenes. Tourjé also lived in Mexico City and was deeply affected by its legendary murals. Trained as a fine artist, Tourjé also became heavily involved in the LA music scene and was a member of the band the Dissidents in the vibrant post-punk L.A. scene of the early to mid 80s.

All these influences are the essence of Tourjé's artwork. The icons of urban culture in his multi-paneled paintings are reverse-painted on acrylic glass, giving them a slick surface reminiscent of surfboards. This may also allude to the glossy sheen that is the allure of today's L.A. in juxtaposition to the grit and funk that was Tourjé's city. His sculptures are 3D expressions that also speak his symbolic language, and there is raw and tribal vibe that permeates all his work.

The artist's connection to the city's cultural past goes beyond his art production. Prompted by his 1998 purchase and renovation of the Nelbert Chouinard house in South Pasadena, Tourjé began researching the history of the Chouinard School of Art. Inspired by its legacy and roster of significant L.A. artists, including Ed Ruscha, Lynn Foulkes, Chaz Bojorquez, he formed the Chouinard Foundation, which from 2006-2009 partnered with the L.A. Department of Recreation and Parks to bring art programming to the inner city. In 2005, Tourjé was part of a group that discovered Street Meeting, the first mural painted in Los Angeles by Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros in 1932, hidden for 70 plus years under plaster at the original Chouinard School in MacArthur Park; a 2006 documentary on the mural's discovery was nominated for an Emmy. Currently Tourjé and the foundation are completing work on The Chouinard Foundation Library, an interactive online platform documenting the school's integral history and more recent past, to preserve and reinforce its vital import in the formation of the now flourishing L.A. art scene. ■