

Curly: The Importance of Arts Education and the Legacy of Chouinard

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When the California Locos were hanging at Red Pipe Gallery, the Locos—Chaz Bojórquez, Dave Tourjé, John Van Hamersveld, Norman Wisdom and Gary Wong—gave a talk about their evolution. The name on all their lips as Chouinard Arts Institute. Four out of five of the guys had gone to school there, and Dave Tourjé had bought the home of the Institute's founder, Nelbret Couinard, then co-founded the Chouinard Foundation to maintain and further the spirit of the storied art school.

Couinard was a name I had heard before through the film *Robert Williams: Mr. Bitchen*. Like Bojórquez, Van Hamersveld, Wisdom and Wong, Williams and his wife Suzanne had both attended Chouinard. So had famed tattooist Bob Roberts (for a summer). Chuck Arnoldi, Larry Bell, Chaz Sam Clayberger, Guy Dill, Laddie John Dill, Llyn Foulkes, Joe Goode, Doris Kouyias, Wei Lo, Edith Head, Gilbert "Magu" Lujan, Lou Paleno, Ed Ruscha, Peter Shire, Charles Swenson, Theodora Van Runkle, Norton Wisdom, Gary Wong were all alumnae.

In other words, Chouinard was responsible for major West Coast art movements (as well as worldwide fashion, thanks Mis Head).

Now the Chouinard Foundation, which Dave Tourjé co-founded with the late Robert Perine, has released [Curly, a free, streaming documentary available for watching on Vimeo](#), about the Chouinard Art Institute's history and the efforts of the foundation to keep alive the methods taught at Chouinard as well as the school's free spirited bonhomie.

Executive produced by the Chouinard Foundation, produced and directed by Gianina Ferreyra and William Devin Walsh, *Curly* looks at the Chouinard Art Institute and its place in Los Angeles history (and at one point, potentially the city's future) by following its influence. Bookending the history of Chouinard is the story of Gustavo "Curly" Fernandez, a high school student involved in an after school arts program created by the Chouinard Foundation in partnership with the City of L.A. Department of Recreation and Parks called "Chouinard at L.A. Rec and Parks," with alumnae serving as guest artists. The artist-driven program ran from 2006-2009 in downtown's EXPO Center and Venice's Oakwood Center, the Foundation's idea being to choose areas least served and to bring top-notch art education to students, some of whom had never experienced art in public schools.

It was through these classes that Curly begins his art education, learning the basics of art and sharing them with his friends. When the economy collapsed in 2008, outside funding became difficult, their own funds depleted, and the Chouinard Foundation was forced to close its "Chouinard at L.A. Rec and Parks" by 2009.

Sadly, Chouinard is not alone: Funding for the arts has been cut from city and school budgets across the country, though finally, there may be a glimmer of hope at LAUSD, as has been recently reported. *Curly* is inspirational in showing the importance of arts education, especially when listening to the many acclaimed graduates interviewed about their experiences at the original school.

Curly delves into the methods taught at Chouinard as well as the school's free spirited bonhomie. One of the most interesting footnotes to Curly: A long-lost mural masterpiece painted in 1932 by David Alfaro Siqueiros— Street Meeting, his first in the United States — was discovered under layers of paint and plaster on the site of the original Chouinard Art Institute, now a Korean church. Until the building is bought, the mural cannot be restored.

The Chouinard Art Institute may no longer be with us, but its graduates continue to paint and inspire, while the Chouinard Foundation continues to keep its spirit alive.

You can watch Curly for free and learn more about Los Angeles' art history [here](#).