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Chouinard's Legacy Lives on in the Documentary *Curly*

Written by Anise Stevens

In *Chouinard: An Art Vision Betrayed*, the late Robert Perine describes his experience at Chouinard Art Institute under the tutelage of Nelbert Chouinard: "She was "an owl, [with] two agate eyes watching all. Reasons for that stemmed from her belief that *a school exists for its students*. If young men and women came to her for an art education...then, by damn, it was her duty to provide it."



Mrs. Chouinard's relentless intent to turn out great artists is what prompted her to provide an ambitious curriculum taught by the best of instructors. "From the start, artists of different stylistic and ideological persuasions as well as mediumistic skills comprised the faculty [of Chouinard], providing students broad exposure to the scope of artistic discourse and allowing each to gravitate to an appropriate mentor," as offered by Peter Frank for *Bluecanvas*.

While the school was forced to close its doors in the early 1970's, its legacy continues. Dave Tourjé, who purchased the home that once belonged to Nelbert Chouinard, is largely responsible for compiling a comprehensive catalog of Chouinard's history. After discovering the school's vital significance as a key component in the prosperity of the many artists who paid witness to Mrs. Chouinard's persistent desire to provide a foremost education in art, Tourjé founded the Chouinard Foundation with the assistance of Perine.

From its inception, the Chouinard Foundation's purpose has been to illuminate the legacy of the school and bring its rich history to public consciousness. Additionally, it aims to provide various programs in an effort to celebrate and extend Mrs. Chouinard's vision for arts education.

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Throughout this period, the program's impact upon its students was captured on film. In *Curly*, a new documentary by executive producer/director Gianina Ferreyra and co-written by William Devin Walsh, we meet Gustavo "Curly" Fernandez, a resident of South Central Los Angeles whose artistic talent would have otherwise been stifled had he not been given the opportunity to participate in the Chouinard Foundation's unique arts education program.

Curly's story, however, isn't all the film offers. It also provides a rich history of Chouinard by interweaving rare, in-studio interviews with various artists whose experiences at Chouinard elucidate just how much Mrs. Chouinard's vision for arts education influenced their lives. Among those featured in *Curly* include Larry Bell, Chaz Bojórquez, Sam Clayberger, Guy Dill, Laddie John Dill, Llyn Foulkes, Joe Goode, Lou Paleno, Ed Ruscha, Peter Shire, Chuck Swenson, John Van Hamersveld, Theodora Van Runkle, Norton Wisdom, and Gary Wong.

While *Curly* gives us the opportunity to realize the historical gravity of Chouinard's contribution as an art school of exception, it also reminds us of how incredibly important arts education is as an integral component to both primary and secondary curricula. Even more, it iterates how its absence doesn't just thwart personal expression but is preventing much of today's youth from recognizing their potential.