



Dave Tourjé

El irreductible arte de la revolución

El entorno en el que vivimos nos marca hasta límites insospechados, como si fuera el escenario de una película que va rodándose a tiempo real y en la que ejercemos tanto de espectadores como de protagonistas. Todo lo demás son elementos aleatorios que nos obligan a tomar decisiones comprometidas y a relacionarnos con la gente que se cruza en nuestro camino. Los artistas que tienen algo que contar forman parte del (selecto) grupo de los que aceptan las reglas de este juego, pero no se conforman con estar inmóviles frente a lo que sucede a su alrededor. Por este motivo sus obras hablan del entorno, lo retuercen en mil formas y tratan de encontrarle sentido a algo que para el resto de mortales resulta inexplicable. Dave Tourjé es un artista californiano que se crio en un barrio del noreste de Los Ángeles en una época de grandes cambios sociales, justo cuando el conservadurismo del *american way of life* se enfrentaba a la explosión del punk. Su obra pictórica busca las raíces de ese pasado rebelde para proyectarlas hacia el futuro, consciente de la importancia de todo aquello que descubrió hace más de cuatro décadas en una ciudad caótica que vivía bajo el influjo de la música, del skate y del surf.

Texto: David Moreu • Imágenes cedidas por Dave Tourjé • Web del artista: <http://www.davetourje.com>



Te propongo emprender un viaje en el tiempo para saber cómo era la ciudad de Los Ángeles en la década de los 70. ¿Qué recuerdos tienes de la vida como adolescente en tu barrio?

El noreste de Los Ángeles era una zona muy diversa, compuesta principalmente por mexicanos y blancos de clase trabajadora. Había constructores de *hotrods*, *lowriders*, pioneros del motocross, obreros, tapiceros y cualquier profesión que puedas imaginar. Esto nos enseñó la satisfacción del trabajo duro, algo muy útil para los artistas. También encontrabas bandas de mexicanos y de blancos, como Los

Avenues y Los Delevan Boys. Siempre chocábamos, pero lográbamos coexistir en ese entorno. A principios de los años 70, cuando me inicié en el skate vertical, esos enfrentamientos se volvieron más frecuentes, sin que ninguna banda retrocediera. Estábamos listos para pelearnos con cualquiera, fuera pandillero o no. A finales de esa década las cosas se calmaron, surgió un respeto mutuo e incluso aparecieron nuevas amistades. A pesar de que mi madre era mexicana, yo salí a mi padre, con la piel clara y pelirrojo. Parecerme a los surfistas o *skaters* no me ayudó demasiado, aunque valoro mucho aquella época tan colorida.

Formaste parte de las escenas del punk y del skate cuando todavía eran *underground*. ¿Crees que esos dos movimientos culturales surgieron como oposición al sistema establecido?

Nací en 1960, justo en los inicios de la Generación X. Entonces éramos jóvenes, pero estábamos muy concienciados porque veíamos la televisión y nos preguntábamos por qué morían tantas personas en la Guerra de Vietnam. Teníamos amigos cuyos hermanos mayores no regresaron o lo hicieron jodidos. El consumo de drogas pasó de estar relacionado con los hippies a ser algo autodestructivo. Mi



instituto estaba considerado el peor por culpa del tráfico de drogas, y tengo muchos amigos que no sobrevivieron o que todavía arrastran secuelas. Yo me salvé de milagro. Mi época no era de "paz y amor", sino que estaba relacionada con el "jódete" por la desilusión que vivíamos. A finales de los años 70 encontramos cierta armonía en el punk y en el skate vertical, que se alejaban del estilo limpio de la década anterior. ¿Entonces todo empezó a arder! La escena punk de Los Ángeles era muy ecléctica y cualquier noche podías ver a Black Flag, The Blasters, Top Jimmy and the Rhythm Pigs y The Minutemen en directo.

Estudiaste en el Art Center College of Design y también en la Universidad de California. ¿Qué destacarías de tu época de estudiante? ¿Crees que el arte puede enseñarse en una academia?

Aprendí a dibujar y a pintar muy temprano, así que entrar en la universidad no supuso ningún problema gracias a las becas. Me aceptaron en el programa del Art Center en 1977. A continuación, me matriculé en la Universidad de California en Santa Bárbara para estudiar Bellas Artes. Honestamente, era y sigo siendo un inadaptado en el mundo del arte. El Art Center fue genial porque se basaba en habilidades prácti-

cas y tenía un ambiente muy abierto y creativo. Por el contrario, la UCSB era un intento de ser como el CalArts y los profesores peleaban para conseguir la titularidad. Me encantó vivir cerca de la playa en Santa Bárbara, tocar en bandas y salir de fiesta. Pero al final me di cuenta de que la universidad no era para mí y la abandoné después de dos años. Entonces me dediqué a la música y no volví a coger un lápiz hasta 1984, cuando participé en una exposición colectiva en el Anti Club de Hollywood. Presenté una serie de pinturas hechas con betún en bolsas de basura.

Tu obra ha sido alabada por "la violencia de sus colores" y también por



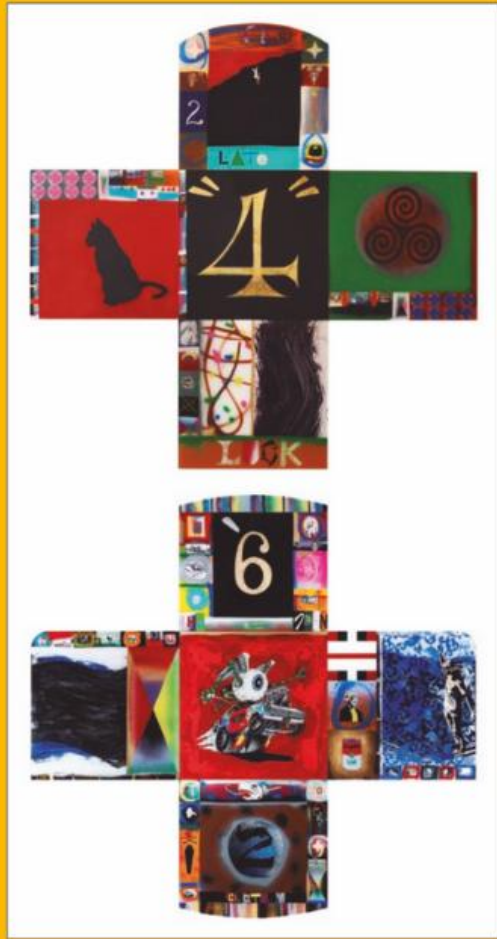
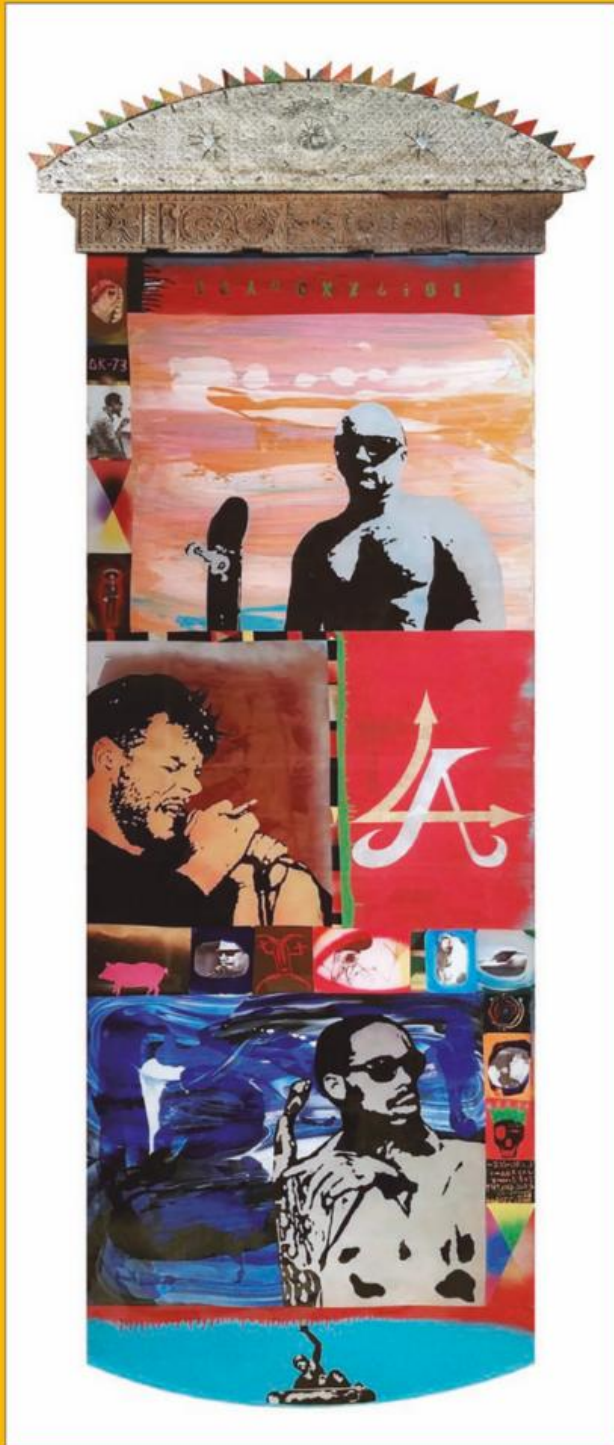
el "simbolismo cultural". ¿Cuándo descubriste que el arte podía ser un estilo de vida?

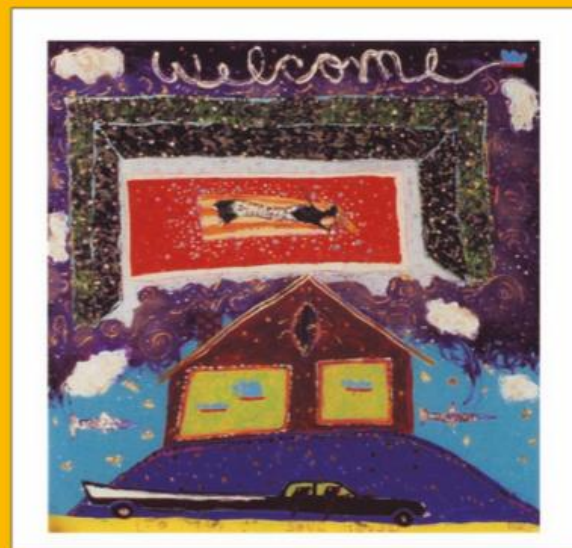
Empecé muy joven y mi entorno era muy violento. ¡Una buena combinación! Mi evolución como pintor ha sido un proceso largo que ha implicado vivir, luchar, sufrir, aprender y jugar. Aunque pocas cosas han tenido que ver con los estudios. Los músicos de jazz hablan sobre la necesidad de tener algo que decir. Eso también puede aplicarse al arte visual. Sin este factor personal, sólo existirían elementos decorativos. ¿Cuál es el mensaje? ¿Por qué? Para crear "buen arte" debemos enfrentarnos a estas pregun-

tas. Lo que yo considero arte en mayúsculas siempre encaja en esta definición. También es necesario ser un producto de tu entorno (física y metafísicamente) porque esto aporta muchos matices a lo que tratas de decir. Sigo aspirando a lograr este ideal, pero me siento cómodo con todo lo que he aprendido, me gusta lo que hago y sé cuándo es bueno. Puedo satisfacerme a mí mismo y, una vez terminé, me separo de la obra para cederle el relevo al espectador.

Por curiosidad, ¿podrías explicarnos cuál es tu proceso creativo y qué técnicas pictóricas utilizas habitualmente para realizar tus obras?

La pintura es mi elección principal porque es la forma de arte más indefinible e incompleta que existe. Como músico, llegas a un nivel en el que resulta fácil expresarte. Sin embargo, pintar es como perseguir el aire. Los buenos pintores pueden fracasar y perder el rumbo. Los no-pintores pueden ser increíbles por que no están sobreeducados. Es un misterio y todos reconocemos una buena pintura a simple vista. Puedes sentirla, independientemente de su estilo. Mi proceso creativo se basa en la pintura inversa sobre grandes paneles de vidrio acrílico, aunque la complemento con aerosoles, collage y deshechos. Es una forma





de arte compleja porque la pintura está detrás de la superficie y resulta muy costosa. No hay segundas oportunidades. El skate vertical y el surf me enseñaron la filosofía de "ir a por ello". Eso significa que te comprometes, no piensas y lo arriesgas todo. Así es como vivo el arte.

¿Qué situaciones cotidianas te inspiran para empezar a dibujar y cuál sería la banda sonora perfecta para trabajar una mañana cualquiera en tu estudio?

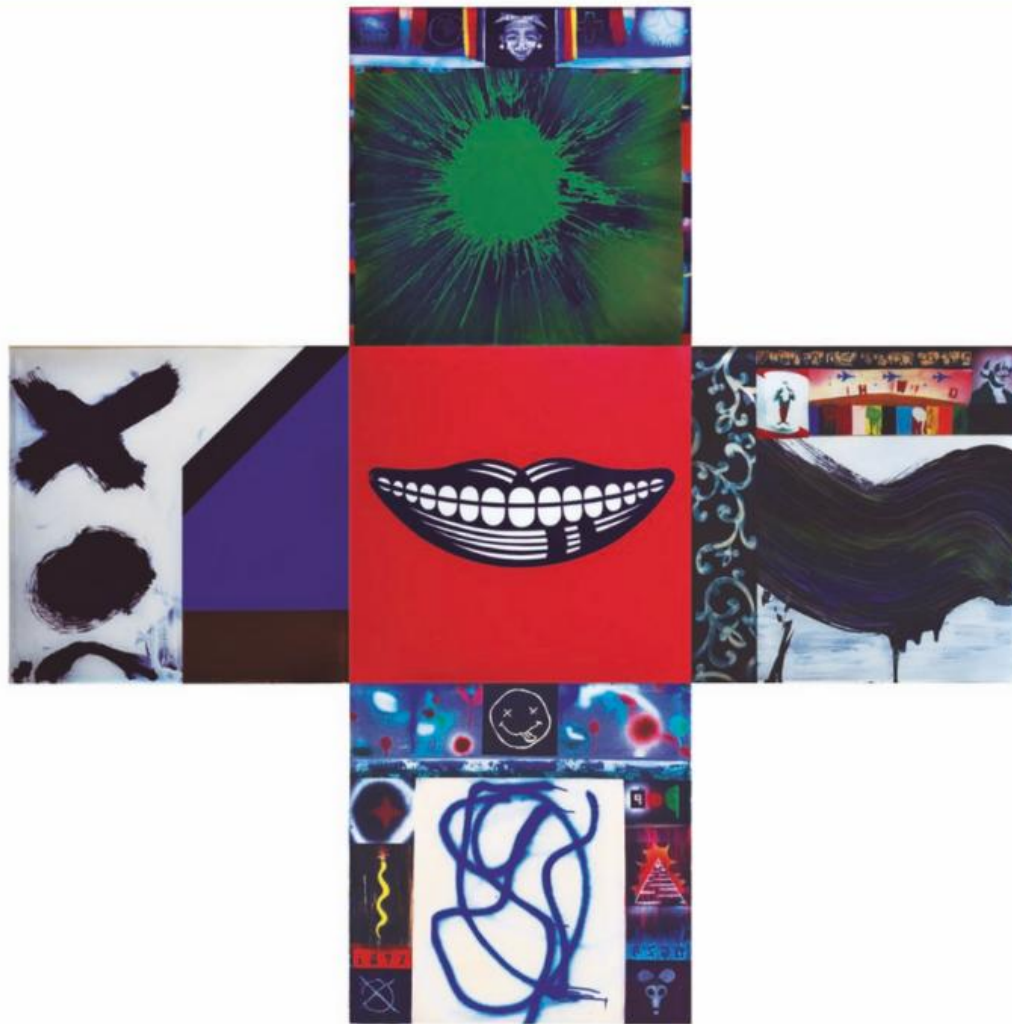
Siempre me han gustado los hotrods y mi padre me enseñó a reparar automóviles. En aquella época los arreglabas y los modificabas tú mismo. No había dinero para hacerlo de otra

manera, pero te servía para descubrir el olor de la pintura y el dolor de romperte los nudillos moviendo motores. Mis mayores referentes eran Ed Big Daddy Roth y Robert Williams. También me marcó la cultura del surf, con John Van Hammersveld y Rick Griffin al frente. Copiar es una parte esencial del proceso de aprendizaje para ser artista, y ellos fueron mis mentores gracias a su obra. Ha sido un honor convertirme en amigo de John y de Robert en mi etapa adulta. En cuanto a la música que pondría para trabajar... es raro porque nunca escucho música en mi estudio. He reflexionado sobre este tema y he llegado a dos conclusiones. La primera: cuando

pinto estoy demasiado concentrado. La segunda: la música es arte y exige atención.

En los últimos años has participado de manera muy activa en el colectivo de artistas California Locos. ¿Cómo empezó esta aventura generacional y qué ideales reivindicáis?

En 2011 me propusieron participar en una exposición en Beverly Hills organizada por el colectivo Pacific Standard Time, que entonces estaba de moda porque promocionaba a artistas desde los años 40 hasta los años 80. Allí empezó a tomar forma una idea y un mensaje porque me di cuenta de que aquella celebración del



arte de Los Ángeles encerraba una curiosidad: la mayoría de participantes no eran originarios de la ciudad. Esto hacía que tuvieran una visión muy romántica porque habían llegado desde otras partes. No los critico, debió ser increíble crecer en el medio oeste, rebelarse contra todo y dirigirse en coche hasta Los Ángeles por la Ruta 66. Por el contrario, mis amigos y yo éramos artistas locales, nos habíamos criado bajo la contaminación y no teníamos una visión romántica. Mi exposición se tituló *L.A. Aboriginal*, que dio lugar a un premiado documental y, más tarde, organicé una mesa redonda en la que participaron los futuros miembros de California

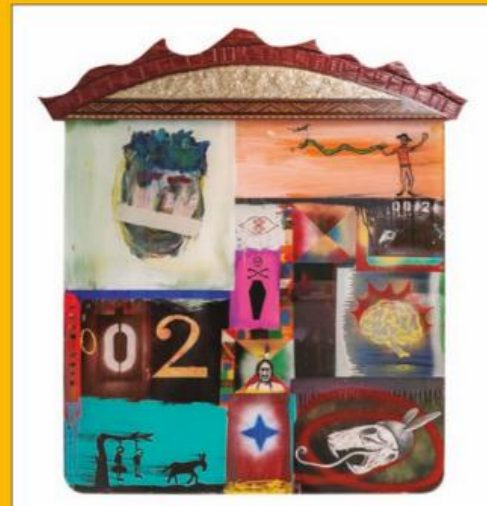
Locos. Allí surgió el nombre del colectivo y hoy todavía seguimos juntos.

Este año has debutado en el mundo cinematográfico con el documental *Crazy World Ain't It* sobre el legendario artista John Van Hamersveld. ¿Cómo describirías esta nueva experiencia creativa?

Podríamos decir que "conoci" a John en 1967 porque mi padre colgó su póster de la película *The Endless Summer* en el garaje. Más tarde fabriqué una tabla de *bodysurf* con madera contrachapada y le pinté su imagen de Hendrix. Pero en realidad nos conocimos en 2002 y, desde entonces, somos grandes amigos y colabo-

radores. No ha pasado ni un solo día en el que no hayamos estado involucrados en algún proyecto. Gracias a esta experiencia he aprendido mucho. Cuando trabajas junto a un maestro, es como si estuvieras bendecido por su genialidad. Entonces me di cuenta de que tenía que contar su historia en un documental y, como nadie tomaba la iniciativa, yo me convertí en el elegido. El mundo del cine se parece mucho a mi manera de afrontar el arte: encontrar la idea, hacer el boceto y pintar. Simplemente seguí el boceto y colaboré con personas con mucho talento.

En un mundo tan globalizado como el actual, tus obras pueden interpretarse



como una reacción a la cultura de masas. ¿Crees que el arte todavía puede influir de algún modo en la sociedad?

Espero que sí, aunque ahora es más difícil porque hay muchos artistas en un universo muy diluido. Todos necesitan ganarse la vida y eso es muy complicado en el mundo del arte. La gente se vuelve competitiva para proteger su "mercado". Esto va en contra del sentido de comunidad y de la verdadera colaboración porque todos luchan por el mismo trozo del pastel. Lo positivo es que el arte sigue siendo algo destacado, con su naturaleza espiritual y su mística. Tengo una gran colección de arte y

compro obras que me aportan todo esto. En las redes sociales no triunfa el "objeto", sino la imagen del "objeto". Creo que la ilustración se ajusta bien al entorno digital porque capta la atención rápidamente. Me gusta porque se basa en las habilidades, aunque yo no soy ilustrador.

California no es solamente un estado dentro de los Estados Unidos, sino que también se ha convertido en una meca de la cultura popular. ¿Por qué crees que encierra tanto misticismo?

Es la Tierra de California, como solían decir en el siglo XX. Entonces la gente ya quería

venir aquí. Algunos incluso afirman que se trata de la tierra mítica que los aztecas llamaban Aztlán. ¿Por qué? Porque tenemos belleza natural, mucho espacio, un clima templado y los días son largos. Actualmente las industrias de la aviación y del surf han aportado la innovación material. Jack Kerouac dijo que es el lugar al que siempre han ido los inadaptados y los tontos. Supongo que podemos asumir que está en mi sangre. Las desventajas son las mismas: demasiada gente, un tráfico horrible y la vivienda es tan cara que hay gente trabajadora en las calles. ¿Cuál es el futuro de California? No lo sé, pero siempre atraerá a más personas. ♣

Dave Tourjé

The Irreducible Art of Revolution

The environment in which we live affects us in unimaginable ways, as if it were the scene of a film being shot in real time and in which we are both the spectators and the actors. All around are changing elements that force us to make committed decisions and to interact with the people who cross our paths. Artists who have something to say are part of the select group of those who accept the rules of this game, but do not settle for being motionless when confronted with what is going on around them.

For this reason, his artwork speaks of the environment, twists it in a thousand ways and tries to make sense of something that for the rest of us mortals is inexplicable. Dave Tourjé is a California artist who grew up in a neighborhood of Northeast Los Angeles at a time of great social changes, just when the conservatism of the American Way of Life collided with the explosion of Punk. His pictorial work seeks the roots of that rebel past to project them into the future, aware of the importance of all that he discovered more than four decades ago in a chaotic city that lived under the influence of music, skateboarding and surfing.

Text: David Moreu • Images courtesy of Dave Tourjé • Artist's website: <http://www.davetourje.com>

Let's start this story from the beginning: how was it growing up in northeast L.A. as a teenager in the early 70's? What about life in your neighbourhood?

NELA was an incredibly diverse place. It was primarily composed mainly of working class Mexican and White people, thus there was an abundance of people who "did" things. Hotrod building, lowriders, pioneers in motocross, tradespeople like construction, upholstery, you name it. This allowed us to learn how to make things and learn the feeling of hard work, which serves well as an artist. As for the diversity, it wasn't just a happy, tolerant neighborhood. We had Mexican and White gangs like Los Avenues, which are named after the numbered avenues in Highland Park where I lived, such as the most notorious at Avenue 43. Also the Delevan Boys - a white gang who also had Mexican guys in it, one who was a master at working on lowriders, for instance. We all clashed but somehow coexisted in this classic blue collar melting pot. Later, when I began in vertical skating in the early '70s, these were a clash of cultures, with neither side backing down. We were ready to

"throw blows" with anyone - gang members or not. I believe we all haunted each other's nights and days!! Eventually, it cooled down into a mutual respect by the late '70s, even friendships. Though I was actually half Mexican, my mother being from Mexico City, I took after my dad, with light skin and red hair, so looking like a classic surfer/skater didn't help me much. That said, these were cherished and colorful times!

You were involved in the early punk and skate scenes in L.A. Do you think those movements started as an opposition to previous music / culture scenes? What about their legacy today?

I was born in 1960 which is considered by some to be the very beginnings of Generation X. At the least, it was the extreme end to the Baby Boomer, Post WW2 era. As such people like me were young, but aware during the '60s. We watched TV and asked questions. Questions about the Vietnam War and why so many young people were dying. We had friends whose older brothers did not return or came back damaged. I remember clearly being 3 years old and watching my parents

crying while looking at the old black and white TV when Kennedy was assassinated. These events were impactful. Drug use went from a sort of "Flower Power", Hippie "peace and love" movement to an aggressively self-destructive one. Our high school was consistently ranked as the highest concerning drug trafficking, and I have many friends that did not live through it and I barely survived it myself. Or they just became permanently damaged and I still have old friends in the neighborhood who are permanently mentally damaged as a residual of those times, who shuffle around the neighborhood mentally gone. So, my era did not buy into "peace and love". It was more like "FUCK THIS" so it became more disillusioned and intensified. As the late '70s approached we found more harmony with the emergence of Punk Rock and in the radical shift in vertical skating that was invented in the mid '70s which departed from the clean-cut surf/skate personas of a decade earlier. It was ON man, and everything was burning!!! L.A.'s Punk scene was eclectic and world class. On any given night you could see Black Flag, the Blasters, Top Jimmy and the Rhythm Pigs, The Minutemen and others. It was the most powerful music scene ever and I was in many bands then like The Dissidents. The musical fusion was rampant and amazing!!

You studied at the Art Center College of Design and also at the University of California. What about your experience there? Many people believe that art cannot be taught in academies because it is something innate...

Well, I was talented with hand/eye coordination and was blessed with teachers who were themselves artists or "makers of things". I learned to draw and paint from a very early age so getting into college was no problem with scholarships. I was in Art Center's Saturday High School program around 1977. Then went to University of California Santa Barbara for Fine Art- their "College of Creative Studies". Honestly, I was and still am a misfit in the Artworld, including the educational system when I

went to school. Art Center was cool for me because it was skill-based and an open, creative environment. UCSB was more a "wanna be" Cal Arts. Teachers fighting for tenure, etc. I loved living in Santa Barbara, on the beach, playing in bands, partying and so on, but in the end, school and all that went with it was not for me and I quit after two years. After that, I shifted to music and entered the L.A. Punk scene I mentioned and had great and creative times with that. I did not pick up a pencil until 1984 when I entered a group show at the Anti Club in Hollywood where I installed a series of paintings on trash bags using shoe polish. Since then, I've shown every single year till today - 35 years!

Your artwork has been praised for "the violence of colours" and also "the culture symbols." When did you start creating your own artwork? What is your aim when working on a piece?

Well as I mentioned, I started young. My parents were very supportive, my teachers very good with art and my environment was very violent and intense growing up - a GREAT combination. As for fully evolving as a painter, that is such a long process that involves living, struggling, suffering, learning, playing - EVERYTHING! Very little had to do with schooling, so it has been a process. In music, particularly jazz, the musician speaks about needing to have something to "say". This is also true in visual art I think. Without it, there is just decoration or non-decoration. What is the point? What is the message? Why? These questions must be confronted to make good art, in my opinion. What I consider to be great art does this as far as I'm concerned. Also, to be a faithful byproduct of one's environment, physically and metaphysically is important as this all adds to what one is trying to "say". Painting is so involved as to what makes it great, that I can only hope and aspire to these things, but I am comfortable with the fact that I have paid my dues and that I do like what I do and know when I think it is good. I've grown confident that I can satisfy myself which is all I can do and once I'm done, I

divorce myself from the work and it's over to the viewer.

Can you explain us your creative process and which techniques do you use for your artwork (collage, silkscreen, Xerox copies, transfers, painting...)? What do you enjoy about each one?

Painting is my apex art form, as it is the most undefinable and incomplete art form there is. As a musician you reach a point that is demonstrably good, easy and clear to express. Painting is like chasing air. Good painters can fall and lose their way. Non-painters can be amazing due to not being overeducated out of their touch and vision. It's a mystery but you know a good painting when you see it. You can feel it, regardless of the style. My process is mainly reverse painting on large acrylic glass panels, also using spray paint, collage and detritus. It's a booby-trapped art form because you paint backwards, the paint is behind the surface and it's very expensive. There is no overpainting or painting things out to get a second chance - you put the brush down and that's it, you are committed. Vertical skating and surfing taught me to "go for it" as the surfer says. That means you commit, you don't think. You risk it all. That's how I view art and that's what I do.

What kind of things or situations inspired you to start drawing and painting? What is the usual soundtrack you play to work in the studio? I know that you are a huge hot-rod enthusiast as well...

I've always loved hotrods. My dad did body and paint work and taught me how to work on cars. In our day, you fixed and upgraded your own cars - there was no money to do it any other way! But, it put you hands-on to the feel and smell of the paint, the shine, the pain of breaking your knuckles fixing engines. What could be better?! hahaha. I was inspired by hotrod culture as a kid - Ed "Big Daddy" Roth and Robert Williams. I copied their work as a teenager. Also surf culture with John Van Hamersveld and Rick Griffin. Copying is an integral part of learning to be an artist and those were my mentors via their art. It has

been a great honor and pleasure to have become friends with John and Robert later in life and to collaborate with them in art. As for music and my studio, it's weird. I don't ever listen to music in my studio. I've thought about it and all I can say is a couple things. One, I get VERY focused when I paint. My work is demanding and complex and I actually don't take visitors or listen to music when I'm painting. Music is art and demands attention and I don't use it as background in my studio.

In the last few years you have been involved with the California Locos collective. How did that project start? Do you think that mentorship still exists in the art world as it happens with jazz?

The LOCOS has been going on way before me and for a LONG time, but was more ethereal, a common experience shared by some people in this crazy SoCal experience of art, music and subculture. I was just one of those people native to the L.A. experience as I talk about in this interview. So, in 2011 I was offered a show in Beverly Hills which crystallized this message. During this time the massive Pacific Standard Time city-wide collective was in full swing which handled art made from the '40s through 1980. Well again, me being an ill-timed misfit stood out for me, because I began doing art in 1980, as many of my friends also came into view then. I also noticed that this celebration of L.A. artists revealed something else - most "L.A." artists were not from L.A.! I developed the idea that this was a romantic "outside-in" view of L.A. derived in part, from these people moving here. It must have been incredible to grow up in the sleepy midwest and cast off as a young person and drive here on Route 66. My friends and I were local, choked on the smog growing up and had a non-romantic "inside-out" view. My show was called "L.A. Aboriginal" or "native". A film was made about me then that won awards around the world and expressed all these things. The show was extended and I created a panel discussion at the end - each person on the panel is now in the California Locos group,

and it was then we were named. So, it all crystallized then and there and became its own movement as we combined our histories from Surf/Skate, Graffiti, Punk and Low/High Art from a "local" context, as native L.A. artists. That's pretty much all I have ever done since!

Recently you have released the documentary "Crazy World Ain't It" about John Van Hamersveld. Why do you think he is still so relevant today? What about your friendship? What about the experience of working on a film?

Well, I first "met" John in 1967 because my dad had pinned an Endless Summer poster up on the garage wall. What a mind-blowing image for a 7 year old artist who was already skateboarding. Later, I made a bellyboard out of plywood and painted his Hendrix image on it. But we actually met in 2002 and became great friends and collaborators ever since. We have not had a gap of even a day where we aren't involved in some creative project since. In that experience, I've learned so much. When you work with a true master, you are blessed by their genius, you could say. What you do with it or what comes of it is another thing. But, in this, I saw that a film was needed to tell his story. I waited in vain for someone to make it, so I was elected! I found that the experience I had being the subject of a film (L.A. Aboriginal) and also Exec Producing a feature length documentary which won awards called Curly for the Chouinard Foundation, left me with the belief I could do it. Film became much like my painting process - idea, rough sketch, paint. I just followed the sketch and collaborated with some very great and talented people!

Nowadays we live in a global world, but do you think art still can change the society like people thought in the 60's? What do you think is the role of illustration in social media today?

Wow...I sure hope it can. But it is very tough now with SO many artists. It's a diluted universe that is so involved now. It's like a giant college party. People all need to make a living, so making a living is such a tough thing in the Artworld. People get competitive to protect their "markets". This closes off the communal elements and true collaboration as everyone fights for the same piece of cheese. Maybe that's the negative side. On the positive is art as the apex art form, spiritual in nature, mystical. The nutrition we all need. I also have a huge collection of art and I buy art that gives me this. Everywhere I walk, whether at home or my studio buildings, there is art to energize and feed me. With social media, it's not the artifact so much as the image of the artifact. I think illustration lends itself well to social media because it grabs your attention quickly. Also, I like the skill-based aspect of illustration, though I am not an illustrator, per se.

California is not only a state in the US, it has also become a pop culture mecca. As an artist born and raised there, what do you enjoy the most about California? Any downside?

It is the "Land of California" as they used to say in the 1800s. Everybody wants to come here and always have. Some say that even the mythical land the Aztecs called "Aztlan" was here. Why? Well, natural beauty, space, mild weather, long days. More recently, the aviation and surf industries, all these add up to material innovation. Jack Kerouac said that it's the place all the misfits and goofballs have always come to. So, it's in my blood for sure. The downside is the same - so many people coming here. Now, the traffic is ungodly - horrible!! The housing is so expensive that working people live in the streets! What is the future of California? I don't know, but I do know it will always involve more people.