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## SOMOS LOCOS: Freedom Rock

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The countercultural art crew that later became known as the [CALIFORNIA LOCOS](#) always stood for freedom, right from the beginning—from before they had a name and before they realized that they represented anything at all, except the need to make art. Chaz Bojórquez, Dave Tourjé, John Van Hamersveld, Norton Wisdom and Gary Wong were once (and sort of still are) just a bunch of crazy, uber-talented kids. Some of them loved to skate, ski, or surf, some just made the scene; some went the art school route, some blew it off. All of them loved to paint, to rip and tag and throw themselves headlong at whatever they were getting into—which was usually trouble. Inspiration came then and still flows from the concrete expanses of empty backyard pools, graffiti-festooned alleys and root-cracked sidewalks; the oceanside dunes of Dogtown and the South Bay; Lowriders, Wayfarers, stencils, Depression-era smoke-writing and later spray-cans; hippie idealism and punk rock clubs; Conceptualism and Central Ave. blues clubs; crossed paths, lost friends, and new generations.

SOMOS LOCOS. We Are Locos. We Are Crazy. We Are the Crazy Ones. But above all, they are the free ones. Free to make art out of anything at all, whatever was at hand, and to tell the stories of the people in their lives, the real people, your people, life experience in pictures and truth. And in this, urged on by a sense of immediacy they could not explain and are still chasing, they employed all manner of high and low mediums and materials as non-traditional and unconventional as the métiers they were drawn from. Each in their own way and in hybridized collaborative approaches, invigorated and emboldened their ever-expanding band of misfits; as such, their influence came to dominate and define some truly revolutionary terrain of regional and national art history. Among the LOCOS there's now an icon of street art who pioneered lettering as a kind of narrative abstraction, a godfather of surf-aesthetic paradigm, an abstract expressionist peace activist, a raw jazz-infused provocateur, and a pop-inflected finish-fetish ringleader. Such artists, by example of their free expressions, encourage us all to be free. Or in this case, they encourage us to be loco.



Chaz Bojorquez

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Dave Tourje

There is no single overarching stylistic through-line per se, no descriptive along the lines of Impressionism, Cubism or Surrealism that could capture a general look. Instead the name works with the feel; it speaks to the energy, the spirit, rather than the appearance, of the art being made. Among the vociferous array are moments of graphic clarity, rough edges and chromatic crispness, high-gloss post-Light and Space resinated surfaces, hard-scored patinated post-war action painting, carefully evocative calligraphy, manipulated photography, hyper-saturated palettes, jagged shadows, monumental presence, and emotional intimacy. There is imagery of surf, sea, boards and decks, but also text, gothic fonts of original invention that communicate in their stylish form as well as pointed content, and prefigure elements that would become emblematic of west coast writing, the slick, black-and-white, territorial finery that was L.A.'s special gift, excavated and reinvigorated by Bojórquez in particular, to the great benefit of later generations such as those active today. This crew radiated a self-confidence that seemed to say, I'm in the streets now, I've got sand in my hair and tar on my feet and scabs on my knees and thrice-broken wrists now—but I am destined for the walls of the world's finest galleries and institutions. And they were right.



John Van Hamersveld

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Gary Wong

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Their headlong experimental deep-dives could literally and figuratively turn nothing into something, transcending expectation and circumstance to celebrate rebellion, storming the walls of the rarefied art world, looking to both subvert and enjoy. They, the LOCOS, were the ultimate insider-outsiders, passionate about their callings, dedicated to their craft, and irreverent about convention, seeing creativity as a way up and out and as its own reward. The moment in cultural history that the LOCOS embody was itself a time of splintering, struggle, and great change for the city and the world. With an iconoclasm bred in the interlaced underworlds of surf, skate, graffiti, rebellion, and music, the LOCOS represented, and continue to celebrate, a break from the shiny optimism of the past that had come to define L.A.'s visual culture, seeking instead to replace it with something dirtier, rougher, and far more vital. They succeeded. As their influence and stature continues to grow, these five have never stopped working, never stopped growing, absorbing, refining, and innovating. What they and their extended tribe of like-minded innovators accomplished changed everything—and not only is the fabled recognition finally coming due, but they are now each doing the finest work of their lives.



Norton Wisdom

[SOMOS LOCOS](#) opens at the Manhattan Beach Art Center on Saturday, March 18. Check the [FACEBOOK EVENT PAGE](#) for details.