



Director Bayou Bennett discusses the making of “L.A. Aboriginal”, the short documentary on L.A. artist, Dave Tourje.

Producing and directing the documentary “L.A. Aboriginal” about L.A. artist Dave Tourje was like filming a feature and putting it into a few minutes. I am from the South and lived in NYC for 10 years, so learning about the underground gang and graffiti life was very exotic for me. We never knew what new adventure or what new thing about the California Locos was around the corner. I enjoy sometimes being an outsider looking in. If I was from L.A., I might not have walked up to an intense group of gangster looking guys in Highland Park and asked to get shots of their authentic low rider cars. But I did and found out just how gentle and full of cultural pride they could be. Besides, I never use stock footage when I can shoot the real thing.

I actually think the most important and exciting thing about being a filmmaker is the way it opens your eyes to worlds and cultures that you might not have known about. Dave Tourje has lived many life times in this life. I got to learn about surf, gang, skateboarding, punk and graffiti cultures. Some of these cultures are not mainstream so it was interesting investigating them. Dave taught me about the raw underground creation of all of these art forms and yes, to me they are all art forms. As filmmakers, we directly saw how Dave was influenced by his environment and its swirling mass of creativity, which filtered deep into his imagination and art. And this in turn inspired us as filmmakers.

When you are creating a film, you are communicating something to the world, just as you would with a painting. My writing/co-directing partner Daniel Lir and I kept trying to think how we could create the ultimate documentary as filmmakers and communicate how deep, meaningful and influential growing up in Southern California really can be. We were in search of capturing a time, place and feeling like Jack Kerouac did with the Beat Generation in “On the Road.”

The way we did this was to gather all the information we could about Dave, his past, his art, and his environment, and portray this in a multidimensional way. We really worked with Dave to get the authentic music of the time period and the truest photos and archival footage. For us, the editing especially reflected the L.A. rhythm and style we were experiencing. And when we won an award on the editing, we knew we were on the right track, especially with the diverse soundtrack of punk, salsa, blues and skate rock which stitched together the stories of the various neighborhoods and ethnic environments.

Each frame was like a colorful piece in one of Dave's paintings. In fact, when I color-corrected the film, I wanted it to feel like L.A. with the bright colors that contrast with the rough dirty smog and hazy afternoon light. When we shot the documentary, we paid attention to the symbols, graffiti and L.A. imagery that are a sort of moving painting in itself. As a filmmaker, I will actually never look at graffiti the same again. I never knew graffiti could be used to express such deep cultural pride as well as to highlight aspects of society that really need to be fixed.

Both Daniel and I lived in New York City for over 10 years. You always hear about the art that comes out of NYC. But why not California? As we were creating this documentary, we wanted to create a film that was as rich and layered as Dave and his roots and also to pay homage to the City of Angels, the home of a truly rich art heritage.

As filmmakers we had memorable experiences filming Dave, and that's what a documentary is all about--the creation of meaningful memories and finding out about life and people. I especially enjoyed capturing Dave's old stomping grounds, such as the bowl he and his wild friends would clean out and skate, turning abandoned cement into a legendary playground. I also enjoyed connecting with Dave's Latin mother about his roots in Mexico City and how a young, curious boy was initially inspired by the great Mexican muralist, Diego Rivera. There were also some intense moments such as revisiting the savage yet somehow humorous encounters Dave had interacting with gang members in his Highland Park neighborhood. And last but not least, blazing down the street in his competition-style lowrider drag racer. All of this compilation of life through film led to a dynamic layered creation that I am proud of and that mirrors L.A. itself.

Bayou Bennett

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