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## L.A.'s Imprint is Undeniably Evident in California Locos at Red Pipe Gallery

Written by Anise Stevens

**This past Saturday, Red Pipe Gallery held the opening reception for their latest exhibition, *California Locos*.**



Featuring works by John Van Hamersveld, Chaz Bojorquez, Norton Wisdom, Gary Wong, and Dave Tourje, the collective body of work that constitutes *California Locos* exemplifies the gallery's commitment to showcasing works by L.A.'s most influential artists.

Among the dozen or so galleries that line Chung King Road and make up what has become a thriving center of art and nightlife in downtown Los Angeles stands Red Pipe Gallery. Operating for just under a year, the gallery has already played host to a number of exhibitions featuring more than 100 works by 50 of Los Angeles's leading artists.

All five artists featured in *California Locos* have had a definitive and lasting impact upon the L.A. art scene. While this is due in part to what Michelle Deziel describes as the influencing power that the "legendary and freewheeling Chouinard Art Institute [had in] shaping [the] experiences [of

all but Tourje]," the unifying spirit upon which *California Locos* is based came from Tourje's desire for a platform upon which native Angelenos could share the ways that Southern California's vast and diverse landscape has impacted their aesthetic proclivities and modes of expression.

When John Van Hamersveld was asked to design a poster for Bruce Brown's film *Endless Summer* in 1964, he had no idea that his innovative use of photography, printmaking, and bright color palette would lead to such a prestigious career. According to Shepard Fairey, "few individuals have had such a lasting and ongoing impact on graphic design, popular art and culture." Credited for designing the truly iconic album covers for The Rolling Stones' *Exile on Main Street*, The Beatles' *Magical Mystery Tour*, and Jefferson Airplane's *Crown of Creation*, Van Hamersveld isn't only responsible for inducting the vernacular of psychedelia into the art world, but his experiences living among the surf culture of Palos Verdes during his youth are largely responsible for his maturation as an artist.

Many consider Chaz Bojorquez the godfather of graffiti art. And for good reason. He is one of the first Chicano artists who successfully transitioned from the street to the gallery. When he was first introduced to the graffiti tradition of East L.A.'s Mexican-Americans, he was enamored by the respect granted to the lettering masters of the Old English "cholo" style writing. Impassioned by the art form, Bojorquez soon began honing his skills by spray-painting along riverbeds in the 1960s, then later by studying fine art and Asian calligraphy. While these experiences fueled Bojorquez's transformation from tagger to artist, they also supplied him with the power to communicate his deep connection to the region of Los Angeles in which he was raised. Several of Bojorquez's paintings are included in the permanent collections of the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C., and the Orange County Museum of Art. Most recently, his work was featured in the group exhibition *Art In the Streets* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.

Under John Altoon's guidance at the Chouinard Art Institute, "Norton Wisdom was introduced...to the bold conceptual-based and humanistic thinking which would lay the groundwork for his future endeavors," as offered by the Robert Berman Gallery. Such is evident in his works marked by a reoccurring three-dimensional picture plane. Keely Weiss suggests that this particular shape has provided Wisdom with an invaluable tool through which he's been able to convey an abstract rendering of all the complexities that constitute "a single, unified understanding: that of the human experience." Wisdom is also revered for his collaborative performances, which he began in 1979. Feeling confined within the boundaries of his studio, he looked to painting spontaneously alongside musicians whose work has and continues to inform his artistry. Nels Cline, Bernard Fowler, Lili Haydn, Flea, George Clinton, Beck, Mike Watt, Rob Wasserman, Dave Navarro and Llyn Foulkes are just a few of the names that make up the long roster of musicians with whom Wisdom has collaborated.

Gary Wong studied under Emerson Woelffer and Matsumi Kanemitsu at Chouinard, along with some of its most renowned alumni, including Al Ruppersberg, Doug Wheeler, Rick Griffin, Mary Corse and Terry Allen. As described by Tom Gregory for *The Huffington Post*, Wong's "visual language is a complex collage-based paint/draw process that often uses photography, and reflects his involvement in music as well as wider social and political concerns." More so, his work is indicative of two distinct and influencing powers upon his overall development as an artist: the surf and skate culture and the rock music scene. Wong's work has been featured in numerous exhibitions including the Chouinard Foundation Gallery, Royal-T, and the Oceanside Museum of Art.

A native of Northeast Los Angeles, Dave Tourje has always relied upon art making as an outlet to reflect his experiences growing up in an area in which daily confrontations between skaters and gangs were the norm. Add to that his involvement in the L.A. music scene and it makes sense that his work has been described as "oscillat[ing] between high and low, punk and institutional hegemony," as offered by the gallery's press release. Tourje's large-scale paintings are a unique mix of expressive painterly gestures and bold iconic imagery characteristic of an urban Los Angeles. Tourje was the subject of a one-man exhibition, which debuted at the Riverside Art Museum in 2002 and has since been exhibited at the Oceanside Museum of Art, the Orange County Museum of Art, and Laguna Art Museum. Tourje is also the focus of Bayou Bennet and Daniel Lir's award winning short, *LA Aboriginal*, which premiered in 2012.

*California Locos* is scheduled to run through June 28th. Red Pipe Gallery is located at 978 Chung King Road in the heart of Chinatown. The gallery is open Thursdays through Saturdays, from noon until 5 pm and by appointment. For additional information, please contact the gallery by phone at 310.663.1296 or via email at [info@redpipegallery.com](mailto:info@redpipegallery.com).

