

Interview with Dave Tourjé

By Mary Anna Pomonis



Mary Anna Pomonis is an artist and a writer living in Los Angeles. Pomonis has shown at galleries and institutions including, the Krannert Art Museum, Diana Lowenstein Fine Arts in Miami, The Torrance Art Museum, Cirrus Gallery, Space B Gallery in New York City, I space gallery in

Chicago and Annie Wharton Los Angeles. Her artwork has been featured in the Huffington Post, Saatchi Online magazine, White hot Magazine and Artweek. Additionally her curatorial projects and essays have been featured at commercial and college art galleries such as The Whittier College Greenleaf Gallery, Post Gallery, Peter Miller Gallery and Circus Gallery.

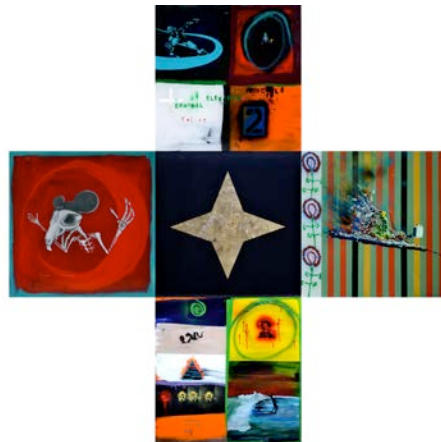
MAP: I have noticed that artists in bands are really different than studio artists. Musicians in bands need other people to make their work, while studio artists work independently and seem to be more introverted in their process. As a musician that makes paintings, how do you deal with the personality shifting involved in these two opposite practices (art and music)?

DT: It is very different in some ways, very similar in others. As an ensemble player, there is a mutual creation of the effect. There is sharing, musical chemistry, telepathy and so forth. And when you play, the result is ephemeral—the sound resides in the audience and evaporates in time. In the (art) studio, you are alone with your ideas. You stare down the blank canvas by yourself. It is very lonely in that way but I also really like it. The artwork does not evaporate but remains in time as an object. Basically, sound and color are just wavelengths perceived by our environmental channels, and that is the similarity—to see sound and hear colors is where it all comes together.

MAP: Who are your biggest influences, both in music and art?

DT: For art, I grew up copying surf and hot-rod mags. I have always loved Rick Griffin and Big Daddy Roth. I was never influenced by traditional art history or movements. For music, it began as rock and roll (The Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, Hendrix, etc.). But I went backwards into the blues like Johnny Winter, Muddy Waters, Little Walter, Robert Johnson. I had a lot of jazz friends and we were heavy into that. I think Coltrane was my religion at one time, then Eric Dolphy and Ornette Coleman. I began hearing the dissonance and polyrhythms, and I think Dolphy is the greatest musician ever.

MAP: Los Angeles as a place strongly influences the imagery in your work. What does it mean to you to be an Angeleno native, and how is that present in your work?

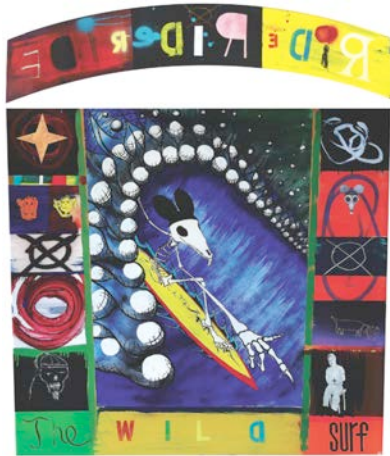


Terminal Elevation Principle Vol. 2, 2011, acrylic, spray paint, gold leaf on acrylic glass, 108" x 108"

DT: Los Angeles is a sea of dichotomies, contradictions and harmonies. I was born here and lived in all the main sub-cultural evolutions, such as BMX, skate, surf, hot-rod, lowrider, punk, etc. It was/is multi-cultural, multi-ethnic. My mom was from Mexico City, I lived in a dual culture. It has taken me decades to finally feel comfortable, that I have reconciled this milieu into a language that communicates it all for me.

MAP: Do you try to imagine your work in its final location when you are creating it?

DT: No, in fact I am sometimes concerned where it may end up—lost on a wall in a vacation home in Palm Springs or something. I make the work for its own sake only. I have no other motivation—financially, commercially or otherwise. What happens after happens....



Ride Ride Ride (The Wild Surf), 2010,
acrylic, spray paint, gold leaf on acrylic
glass, 60" x 90"

MAP: What is your process?

DT: The act of painting is the final act, and it is a relatively short process. The actual work begins as a flash idea that I carry around mentally sometimes for months. I may make a crude sketch. I kick it around and change it because it is usually an abstract idea, not a narrative reality. Generally, I do not "understand" it in the usual sense, but I know it is right. So, I have had to develop a more intuitive approach more common to musicians. It's "feel." Life itself—the world around me, what goes on in the world, people, experience—this is the actual studio. Then it all gets condensed in this process into the final form, the work itself. So, I consider that

I am always in the studio, always creating, because this process is always happening. I come up with musical ideas the same way, which I record on a handheld recorder so I don't forget. It's 24/7. Sometimes it's best for me to leave town for a while, because in the quiet of a new space I generate more new ideas that enter the process.

MAP: How does the term "street" apply to your work?

DT: Street means sub-culture, really. The color and energy found in the urban environment. I grew up in L.A., very much a part of that. It's what always inspired me and still does. I love other things, but that is my core and it is the reconciliation of these influences that I have spent my time attempting.

MAP: Does street art lose its credentials when it's viewed in a museum, and can it be appreciated in a massive survey show like the "art of the streets" at MOCA?

DT: The artist creates new realities in the culture, this is nothing new. The MOCA show to me is just a signal, that this aesthetic has reached the mainstream, so why get upset about the politics of it. It could not be stopped or prevented from happening, just like Elvis could not be stopped, or surf culture aesthetic. Something that powerful could never be contained. The question is whether it all translates to a gallery view,

which I do not think it so, though some, like Chaz, do. Time will tell how it all shakes out.

MAP: Who is the best skater alive and who is the best you have skated with? The best musician? The best painter?

DT: It's always hard to say "best." Jay Adams is the most influential skater, I think. Then Christian Hosoi.

As for music, the greatest are no longer alive—[artists] like Captain Beefheart, Eric Dolphy, Muddy Waters. But it's all opinion, I'm sure there are some greats out there. Peralta and Shogo Kubo would come to our bowl in Mt.

Washington and

skate—that was inspiring. My friend saw drummer Frank Butler (Miles Davis, etc.) play at Donte's. He was homeless, so Daryl invited him to stay at his pad. We would jam with this

Great, who would teach us about improvisation in parallel concepts—like chasing someone down and trapping them. He said he was in the Lionel Hampton Band playing at the Kennedy inauguration and told us they were shooting junk, looking up through the bleachers while Kennedy spoke—pretty crazy shit—but impressive to us.



Of Every Any, 2004, acrylic, spray paint, gold leaf on acrylic glass, 72" x 86"

Q: Your work seems to teeter on the edge of High Brow and Low Brow. You use spraypaint but you're not a graffiti artist. You were immersed in the skate and music scenes of the 70's and 80's but are not captured by those periods. How do you explain this?

A: I was there. I lived it. I did it. Anyone who did, knows the vitality and energy of that moment. I was not a "street" artist, practicing my art in the street. I just refer to it, as it was important to me, but it does not comprise everything in the work. There were no graffiti "artists" back then where I was from - just gangs writing with that tense back and forth dialogue. I like being independent as opposed to being part of a group aesthetic and I refer to many things including car culture, the word, conceptualism, light and space and so on. I'm not looking to my

past in order to get back to it in some way, but I'm deriving the energy I recall from it to blend with more abstract, sophisticated concepts I'm looking to articulate.

Q: Describe the L.A. music scene of the late 70's through the mid 80's.

A: It was amazing! Punk, funk, country, metal - whatever. It was electric and alive with people pushing boundaries around, so the lines blurred and it became very fertile. These hybrids began popping up like the Chili Peppers, Minutemen, etc. It was like nothing ever seen since. You could catch Dexter Gordon at Concerts by the Sea, then the Dickies at the Whisky in the same night. X, the Blasters, Top Jimmy and the Rhythm Pigs. The shit was ON, man!!

MAP: Bringing it back to the art where does that stuff show up formally in your material choices? What colors and textures are you attracted to and why?

DT: For painting, I love the slickness of my medium on acrylic glass. It reminds me of hot-rods or surfboards. The color is supersaturated and unaffected by texture as in canvas. As for sculpture, I like the grit and funk of the found object. It's a different process, whereby disparate elements find their final place, according to my opinion. Larry Bell said that the work is the evidence of the investigation. That works for me. ■

