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THE FINE-ART TRANSFORMATION OF SKATEBOARDS

BY JENNIFER HENRY PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHANE O'NEAL



"I swore I'd never do another group show again!" laughs Michael Todoran on the eve of his second "kinda confusing because usually these things are annual" Las Vegas Hand Painted Skate Board Show. LVSK8 One, Todoran's first curation of skateboard decks by 56 local artists and shown in UNLV's Grant Hall in April 2006 was a marked success. It inspired LVSK8 Deuce, which debuts during December's First Friday festival at artist Mark T. Zeilman's MTZ Gallery.

Originally conceived as a collection of 15 pieces by Todoran and his close friends, excitement about LVSK8 One prompted eager artists to approach the organizer for an opportunity to work on a board. "I was getting phone calls from people I'd never met who heard about what I was doing and wanted to be part of it," he says. "I'd buy 10 more boards and then more people would approach me. That's how the show grew, gradually, 10 boards at a time."

With last minute submissions pouring in during the Grant Hall opening and more than 20 no-shows, Todoran cursed the chaos and vowed never to organize another group show, a declaration the artist first made while compiling a 2003 print exchange at UNLV. But both shows paid off, garnering accolades and record attendance. "There was a crowd of people waiting for Grant Hall to open," Todoran reminisces about LVSK8 One's reception. "I don't ever remember a show getting that kind of response."

This time around Todoran planned for the pandemonium, asking artists from the first collection to take on another board and feeling out a fresh crop of contributors that he is confident will come through. "We're at about 100 artists, but you never know how many will show up," says Todoran. Among the most reliable are his fellow UNLV alumni, in-progress BFAs and MFAs. LVSK8 One

included boards from post-thesis MFA Chad Brown, '07 MFA Danielle Kelly and Associate Department Chair Helga Watkins.

But fine art isn't the focus of Todoran's skateboard shows. Nor are they about the tattoo subculture, though many of the participants are prominent tattoo artists such as LVSK8 Deuce's co-sponsor and Bad Apple Tattoo Company owner Boom. It isn't about skate art either. "You can't paint on skateboards without introducing that culture into it," says Todoran. LVSK8 One and Deuce have been a vehicle for Todoran and invited artists to "break the fine art rules."

Repeatedly characterizing LVSK8 as a "refreshing experience," Todoran says the excitement level surrounding the events mirrors the enthusiasm he feels from the participating artists. "It's a low pressure environment; no juries, no criticism, just the artists and their work." Friendly competition is yielding ever more inventive submissions and though Todoran is reluctant to preview pieces before the show, he promises LVSK8 Deuce will be even better than the first. And there might just be a third collection on the horizon. "Maybe," smiles Todoran. "Let's see how I feel after this one."

Get board stiff at www.michaeltodoran.com