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Raw Imagination: The Feral Art of Robert Williams

BY: Michelle Trivisonno

<http://localemagazine.com/robert-williams-juxtapoz-art-exhibit/>

Locale Magazine Says:



Robert Williams of Juxtapoz Presents Slang Aesthetics

In the world of art, Robert Williams is an outlaw. His vividly sensational paintings project an eyeful of controversy making both your blood pressure and heart rate increase. Drawing inspiration from B-movie posters, comic books, hot-rods, and girly magazines, his work is not for the faint of heart. Williams playfully admits, “I don’t paint for everybody. I’m not Thomas Kincade,” but Williams’ art can be intellectually thrilling to those willing to consider the spiritual value of cheap thrills.

As founder of Juxtapoz art magazine, Williams has opened the door for young freestyle artists by creating a space to accommodate the wilder side of imagination (the vulgar side too often rebuked by the Fine Arts scene). The fact that Williams is the forefather of this art movement is quite surprising considering the resistance his art so often meets in the world of “high-culture” traditional art. As Williams explains, “I come up through comic books and the underground and the hot rod world. I am

really only tolerated under certain circumstances... it's still an uphill struggle for me.” But this struggle has paid off with the success of Juxtapoz and its artists to prove it. Today, Juxtapoz is the best-selling art magazine in America, and as Williams states, “The art world cannot hide from that magazine any longer.”



After twenty years of publication for Juxtapoz, the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery has come to celebrate Robert Williams for boldly pioneering the lowbrow art of conceptual realism in the gallery showing of *Slang Aesthetics: 20 Years Under the Influence of Juxtapoz*. “I would like to joyfully welcome people to the show. It is like nothing Los Angeles has seen before,” says Williams. And this is true... *Slang Aesthetics* is not your everyday art exhibition. The art here is loud (check out the painting “Auditory Sadism”), colorfully saturated and exaggerated with images of teeth (check out the “Rapacious Wheel” statue) and snakes, Hollywood devils and speed dating. Williams’ art thematically engages with the institution of consumer culture, postmodern love, technology, hyperreality, and all things low-culture to bring about a shocking yet highly intelligent perspective on American life. By the time you’ve finished the exhibit you might feel you’ve just overdosed on intellectual

psychedelia! But that's the beauty of Robert Williams, who describes his work as being, "ridiculous to the point of poetry." Whereas the subject matter may be racy (sometimes even libidinous), the grotesque art of Robert Williams is always speaking to reality, expressing something at once terrifying and brilliant about the brutal world.



In talking with Williams about life before Juxtapoz he reveals, "The only place I could really show art was in punk rock after hours clubs," this of course being in the 80s where the music of X-Ray Spex, Blondie and Lydia Lunch was often performed. In 1987, Guns N' Roses adopted Williams' painting titled "Appetite for Destruction" to use as both their album title and controversial cover art. Before that, Williams worked as an artist for hot-rod icon Ed "Big Daddy" Roth in the 60s as well as one of the founding artists for Zap Comix alongside underground cartoonist R. Crumb and others. Relics of Williams' art career from these eras can be seen on display at the Slang Aesthetics show, including a collection of paintings in Views from a Tortured Libido which features an introduction by the infamous Dr. Timothy Leary.



Robert Williams has devoted himself to an artfully subversive perspective that is irreverent to classical understandings of sophistication. This, perhaps, is the main theme of *Slang Aesthetics*: “Sophistication is the enemy of imagination,” (as Williams notes in quoting Pablo Picasso). Surely, the art of Robert Williams lacks as much of this classical sophistication as it does restraint, but this only accentuates its wild energy and extreme relevance to modern times. Williams is not one to mind the friction with which his art is met from most art circles. The defiance, he feels, is what gives it a pulse. Williams states, “If alternative art gains national acceptance and it dominates, then it will get stale and have to be taken over by some other form. As long as this kind of art is struggling, then it’s OK. But when it’s socially accepted in the Fine Arts world, it’s a dead duck ... a dead duck. Its vitality is gone.” *Slang Aesthetics*, showing now until April 19th, is a graphic celebration of this transgressive livelihood taking place in art today.

Native Knowledge: Saturday, March 28th, Robert Williams will have a book signing at 2:00 p.m. and admission is free

Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery Located at Barnsdale Park
4800 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90027

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Locale Magazine
March 27, 2015