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Chouinard, the Legendary Art School, Launches Virtual Library

By Tibby Rothman Mon., Jan. 9 2012 at 12:56 PM
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Photo by Jim Duggan ©J. Paul Getty Trust

The Getty Center's Central Garden, designed by Robert Irwin, who was an influential teacher at Chouinard Art Institute.

Sometimes stories start simply: In 1999, Dave Tourje, an artist who supported himself through construction, purchased a house. He bought it for many of the reasons other people buy their cribs, but what it wound up giving him was a calling. The 1907 residence had been the South Pasadena home of Nelbert Murphy Chouinard.

Decades before Los Angeles' emergence as an art force through the Ferus Gallery and almost a hundred years before the Getty Foundation launched Pacific Standard Time -- the current cross-city celebration of postwar Los Angeles artists -- Chouinard founded the school called Chouinard Art Institute. Though Chouinard herself was a painter, it would be the school not her art that became her legacy.

Tourje recently helmed the archiving of works from Chouinard and just launched an interactive library dedicated to the school's history and artists.

"It's one of the most important art schools in the world. That's not hyperbole, if you look at who [attended and] what they did," notes Tourje.

The names that were taught, taught there or were part of its hub? Ed Ruscha, the Light and Space movement's Robert Irwin, muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros, architect Rudolph Schindler and Ferus' talented but tragically deceased John Altoon.

Chouinard was "like the backbone" for the LA art scene from 1945 -1980, the years covered by the Pacific Standard Time shows, says Tourje. But by the time Tourje entered its realm, the school's identity had been subsumed into CalArts in 1972.

Tourje and his partner, the late Robert Perine, attempt to resurrect the famed school as a teaching institute was beaten back by financial challenges in 2006. But Tourje has refused to see Chouinard's legacy lost.

The new website he's spearheading, located at www.chouinardfoundation.org contains interviews with such artists as Llyn Foulkes, Mary Corse, Laddie John Dill and graphic designer John Van Hamersveld -- responsible for the surf world's quintessential *Five Summer Stories* *Endless Summer* film poster and the Rolling Stone's *Exile on Main Street* vinyl cover. The site also offers archival news articles and other historic pieces and will

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offer goodies such as the student work of hard-edge painter Frederick Hammersley.

A comment board demonstrates the loyalty the school drew. "Chouinard not only taught you the techniques of being an artist, it also, and most importantly, taught you how to live as an artist. Everyone is different. In my case, this was my experience. I learned a lot more than what was mentioned in the brochure," writes Laddie John Dill.

Other stalwart names drop by to add their two cents. We won't spoil the surprise by using their names here.

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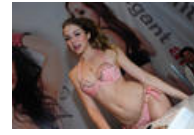
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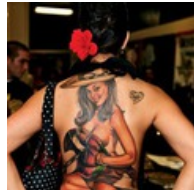
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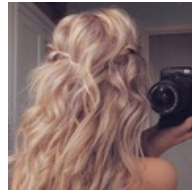
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