ART FOR THE OCEANS

Words: Steve Blank / Photos: Courtesy of Wireimage

Nearly 700 people including celebrities, New York socialites and a host of East Coast surfers descended upon Milk Studios in New York City's Meatpacking District on Saturday, October 15 for the Surfrider Foundation's first ever Art for the Oceans Auction.

Master board shaper Al Merrick of Channel Islands Surfboards (boardmaker to Kelly Slater, Rob Machado, Lisa Anderson and Sofia Mulanovich) created 35 6’2” fish surfboards which were sent to artists around the globe. These artists were asked to paint, sculpt, draw or in some other form turn the boards into art. The results were simply astounding and included works by John Severson, Don Ed Hardy, Kevin Short, Ned Evans, Robb Havassy, Wolfgang Bloch, Dibi Fletcher, Gomez Bueno, Michael Cassidy, Tracy Fath, Billy Al Bengston, Victor Kepel, Peter Harper, Peter Schroff, Peter Spacek, Chris Lundy, Walter Iooss, David Carson, Ken Price, Gus Van Sant, Alex Kopp, Wyland, Rogan, Raymond Pettibon, Ashley Bickerston, Laddie John Dill, Dave Hrobretch, Drew Brophy, David Lloyd, Kevin Ansell, Thomas Campbell, John Van Hamersveld, Rick Rietveld and Melinda Morrey. (To view the boards visit www.surfrider.org/auction2005.)

Gene Cooper of Cooperfish Surfboards contributed a Dick Brewer inspired 12-foot 1960's style Makaha gun with an astounding wood-toned resin tint under the glass, Montauk denizen Tony Caramano
cio (“the Mayor of Ditch Plains”) offered up an 8-foot version of his signature model single fin adorned with pages from his surf diary – circa 1980 – laminated below the glass. And, surf pioneer Herbie Fletcher salvaged pieces of various surfboards broken in the waves out front of his home on the North Shore of Hawaii to create a 6-foot by 6-foot version of his popular “Wrecks.” This particular version included boards from Andy Irons, Bonga Perkins, Timmy Curran and Herbie’s son, Christian Fletcher. Herbie also had a hand in the creation of the evening's masterpiece. Utilizing his well-honed shaping skills, Fletcher crafted a 12’ full-gun which was then painted by world-famous artist Julian Schnabel. This board fetched the highest price for the evening going to an anonymous buyer for a whopping $75,000.

The entire evening’s festivities were produced by Lyman Carter and his staff at Plug Limited in New York City. Lyman has created parties for some of the fashion industry’s biggest names including Victoria's Secret, Diesel, Christian Dior and Hugo Boss. Given his experience in major event creation and planning Surfrider’s first foray into New York City’s party scene was certain to get noticed.

And it did. The evening opened with a one-hour collectors’ preview where potential bidders had their first chance to see the boards on display. As the general public filled the room the excitement and anticipation grew. The evening’s emcee, world-champion and Surfrider Advisory Board Chair, Shaun Tomson, then kicked off the event by welcoming the crowd of nearly 700 and introducing Surfrider Foundation’s Executive Director, Jim Moriarty. Jim described to the crowd the importance of Surfrider’s efforts in New York and compared the recent beach access victory in Rockaway to the creation of New York’s Central Park. After Jim’s brief comments, Scott Hulet stepped to the podium. Scott is the editor of The Surfers Journal and as curator of the auction played a critical role in identifying artists and getting them to participate in this unique experience. Scott’s comments
focused on the one-of-a-kind nature of the boards and emphasized that only six or eight of the participating artists had ever painted a surfboard in the past and likely would be the only ones to ever paint a surfboard in the future. Thus, the assembled pieces were truly “never to be seen again.”

After Scott’s brief introduction to the collection he brought Simon de Pury of the Philips de Pury auction house to the podium. Simon promptly kicked the auction off and drove it into high gear. The audience rapidly came alive and amid much catcalling, hooting, applause and whooping he began auctioning the boards off in rapid succession. Within two hours each of the boards had sold to the highest bidder and the auction portion of the evening concluded with a heated bidding war for a last minute addition to the evening’s offering – a five-day, all-inclusive surf trip to South Africa for six people with Shaun Tomson serving as guide to his favorite surf breaks, restaurants, and local attractions. Definitely a once in a lifetime opportunity.

As the auction concluded, guests moved to Studio Two which had been set up as a lounge with water themed lighting, overstuffed couches, and DJ Ursula 1000 – one of New York’s hottest up-and-coming mixers. Guests were also treated to specialty cocktails featuring Svedka Vodka and beer provided by Red Stripe as well as tray passed appetizers provided by New York’s premier caterer, Olivier Cheng. As Ursula 1000 concluded his first set, guests quickly filed back into the main room to enjoy a 40-minute acoustic set by New York based recording artist, Citizen Cope. The audience was captivated by the performance that featured renditions of his songs Son’s Gonna Rise, Penitentiary, Bullet and a Target and others.

Notable sightings during the evening included actress Mena Suvari (American Beauty), director Morgan Spurlock (Super Size Me), models Amy Wesson and Bridget Hall and record industry executive Damon Dash and his wife, designer Alicia Roy. Also spotted in the crowd was longboard maestro Joel Tudor.

Overall, the evening raised more than $320,000 in unrestricted funds for the Surfrider Foundation. This much needed revenue will help to fund the organization’s ongoing projects and mission related work throughout the United States. But, apart from the money raised, the event signaled the “planting of Surfrider Foundation’s flag” in New York City and provided a definitive answer to the age old question “Surfers in New York? Really?” Yes... Really.

The Surfrider Foundation would like to thank: Plug Limited, Milk Studios, Base Design, Philips de Pury, Loomstate, Svedka, Red Stripe, Olivier Cheng, Stebich Ricder International, Caramel Sound, Surfline, The Surfers Journal, Clark Foam, Kadan, Channel Islands Surfboards, Cole Surfboards, Mark Babbski, Shaun Tomson, Lance Anderson and Harold Hofer for their efforts in making the Art for the Oceans Auction a tremendous success.

Go to http://surfriderfoundation.typepad.com/shapingroom/ for more coverage of the event.