



Sullivan Goss

AN AMERICAN GALLERY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CA COOL

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SANTA BARBARA, CA – It’s a shifting target – an ineffable state. Is it an attitude? Or a posture? Is it a certain pair of jeans? It’s cool, man. It’s out there. It’s edgy. It’s hip, but it isn’t out to be hip. It’s aloof. It shreds. It rocks. It moves fast, but it takes it slow. It’s real cool, sister. It takes chances. It improvises. It’s not without passion, but it doesn’t care what you think. It’s cool. And it probably comes from California.

Of uncertain origin, the word “cool” almost certainly moved towards its present place in the English language through African American slang. It was popularized by jazz musicians, certainly by the 1940s, but some sources cite its currency as early as the 1920s.

It’s definition is as protean as style itself, but its connection to California is concrete. Hollywood’s stars like James Dean traded in it. The Beats – a counter culture movement centered in San Francisco – wrote many of its manifestoes. Surfing, skateboarding, hot rodding – these historically cool pursuits may have been born elsewhere, but they were popularized here. What is about doing something so dangerous as a leisure activity that seems *so cool*? California’s Apple Computer differentiated itself as the cooler computing machine. The LA post-war artist group centered around the Ferus Gallery branded itself as “The Cool School.” In 2007, the Orange County Museum of Art mounted *The Birth of the Cool*, roping together California designers like the Eames’ with hard-edge abstract artists like Karl Benjamin. California’s image of itself as so laid back as to seem detached suggests a natural affinity. The image of the cowboy, so emblematic of the West, likewise connotes a certain maverick, loner quality: traits that suggests a certain cool. California’s historic lack of compelling authority structures in art – tastemaking museums, critics, or collectors – made its art scene particularly daring and improvisational. California, it seems, was destined to serve as a kind of cool factory.

In turn, California has marketed and exported this sense of cool around the world. Indeed, in the last six months, three significant auctions and/or online retailers have put together offerings under the label, “California Cool.”

Curator Jeremy Tessmer has assembled modernist / minimalist paintings and sculptures from the 1950s to the present day that exhibit traces of the detachment implied by coolness. Many are bright and colorful, though, reminding us that 'cool' is neither too hot *nor too cold*. There are also nods to surf culture and to skate culture, to graphic design and to product design. There are contemporary works, by artists based in Santa Barbara and Los Angeles, that both reflect coolness and critique it.

Recognizing that to self-identify as cool is to be not cool, it should be noted that none of the artists asked to be in this show. These are works that the gallery thinks are pretty cool. Viewers will have to see if they agree. Being cool means making your own determination.

Artists included in the exhibition: HERBERT BAYER | KARL BENJAMIN | KEN BORTOLAZZO | JULES ENGEL | DAVID FLORES | SIDNEY GORDIN | | ROGER KUNTZ | DAN LEVIN | JOHN McCracken | R. NELSON PARRISH | HANK PITCHER | KEN PRICE | ALEX RASMUSSEN | ED RUSCHA | JEAN SWIGGETT | ROBERT TOWNSEND

Come to the opening. Visit, explore, collect! 1st Thursday, July 2nd from 5 - 8pm.