

“AMERICAN ARTIFACT: THE RISE OF AMERICAN ROCK POSTER ART”



Movie poster by rock poster artist, Dennis Loren

*"Finally, a true American form of artistic expression is given the long-overdue credit it deserves!"*  
- Scott Mantz, Access Hollywood

*"American Artifact" beautifully captures how artists pushed the boundaries of their own work in solidarity with the musicians who mattered most to them.*" - Christian Toto, Whatwouldtotowatch.com

*"It will lead, for many, not only to an enjoyable couple of movie-watching hours, but also to a lifetime of collecting gig art."*  
- Paste Magazine

*"American Artifact does a fine job of explaining why this visual offshoot of the musical medium might be considered equally important."*  
- Detroit Metro Times

*"A stylish and imaginative film that does its subject matter justice"* - The Moving Arts Film Journal

*"Wonderfully meticulous, inspired and enthusiastic"* - Exclaim Magazine

*"American Artifact is a captivating and long-overdue tour through one of pop culture's most fascinating sub genres"*  
- Chronogram Magazine

**World Premiere:**

June 20th, 2009 at the Rock Poster Society "Rock Art By The Bay" event, San Francisco, CA

**Running Time:**

88 min

**Synopsis:**

American Artifact chronicles the rise of American rock poster art since its birth in the '60s.

Director Merle Becker crosses the country interviewing rock poster artists from the different eras to discover that America is currently in the midst of a 21st century "rock poster art movement", where thousands of artists around the country are doing silk screened rock poster art inspired by their local scene, the music of our time, and the spirit of our era.

The film features interviews with renown artists including Stanley Mouse, Victor Moscoso, Frank Kozik, Art Chantry, EMEK, Tara McPherson, Derek Hess, COOP, Jay Ryan, and more, as well as fans, collectors, and musicians.



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### Director's Statement:

Around 2004, I was in a bookstore, and I came across a huge coffee table book of rock posters called "The Art of Modern Rock". I was floored. Up until that point, I had no idea rock posters were still even being made.

As a kid, I remember all these amazing album covers, sometimes prompting me to buy the album just for the artwork. Then came CDs, and the artwork shrank to a little 5X5 inch square. Then, it became a digital download, often being delivered without any art at all – But, with the rock posters, here was this whole collection of artwork that went along with the bands I loved. The rock visuals were back!

At the time I saw that book, I was working a corporate television job at MTV, but I needed a change. So, a week later, I quit my job, and decided to travel across the country interviewing rock poster artists for "American Artifact".

As I started doing research for the film, I came across a website called GigPosters.com, where over 20 thousand rock poster artists post their work. It was (and is) an unbelievable collection of the coolest rock imagery one could ever imagine.

I quickly realized that this wasn't just a little hobby that a few people were doing on the weekends in their basement. It was essentially a modern day "art movement", pertinent to our era: The Era of Rock and Roll.

My initial intent was, of course, to find out why so many artists are drawn to doing rock posters (no pun intended). What drove them to pursue a career that often, barely paid the bills? What were their inspirations and motivations?

However, I also wanted to tell a clear story of the history of this art form; how it started, how it so closely paralleled cultural change, and how it got so huge today. It was always my intent to make a film that was not only entertaining and fun to watch (like many of the personalities in the film), but to also make a film that was informative; one that you would walk away from feeling like you learned something.

Like many independent filmmakers, I was unable to get funding for the film. I had quit my job, taken large chunks of time off to work on it, and just about the time I was expecting to grab some freelance corporate work to pick up the slack, the recession hit. So at times, it felt a bit like the experiences of so many of the artists I spoke with; existing on the bare minimum for about four years to get the film finished. And, at some point, I felt that this was part of the story, too.

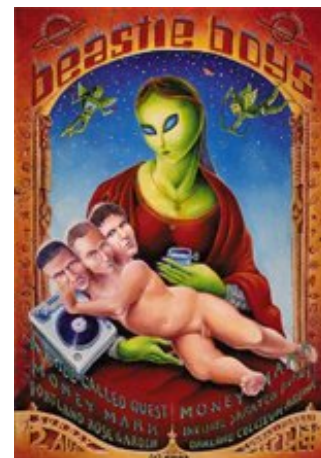
But money woes aside, it got finished. And, looking back, it was worth every second.

It is my hope that this film causes people will see this "lowbrow" art in a different way: as beautiful pieces of art, that are also valid statements about the cultural changes that America has seen throughout the years.

And, it is also my hope that the film inspires people to let go of whatever holds them back from doing something they love, and encourages them to just go do it!



"Green Girl" by Frank Kozlik



"Beastie Boys" by EMEK



Director Merle Becker and punk flyer artist, Winston Smith

**Select Cast Biographies:**



**Stanley Mouse (1960s):**

Stanley Mouse grew up in Detroit, MI, where his art skills gained him notoriety during high school when he started doing airbrushed "hot rod tee shirt" designs at the state fair. Having earned enough money to own the nicest car in his class, Mouse left Detroit for San Francisco in the mid-'60s, where he met his art partner, Alton Kelley (d. 2008). Stanley is perhaps best known for creating the famous "Skeleton and Roses" poster for the Grateful Dead with Alton, an image which the Grateful Dead later used for their logo.



**Victor Moscoso (1960s):**

Victor Moscoso is a classically trained artist who studied at Yale and started working in the underground comix scene with Robert Crumb in the early '60s. Inspired to start doing rock posters by a poster he had seen by his contemporary, Rick Griffin, Victor soon became known for his optical illusions and vibrating / psychedelic color patterns. "I turned the rules that I had learned in art school upside down: A poster was supposed to be easy to read and the colors were supposed to be pleasing to the eye. I did exactly the opposite. That's how you get attention!", claims Victor.



**Frank Kozik (1990s):**

Frank Kozik is often credited as the one who inspired the resurgence of rock poster art in America today. Frank was born in Europe, and his parents were estranged when Frank was still very young. After moving to the United States, Frank found himself in Austin, Texas in the 1980s, right in the midst of a blossoming underground music scene. With the help of artist and silkscreener Lindsey Kuhn, Frank started doing huge, colorful, silkscreened posters at a time when America was seeing mostly black and white flyers on the telephone poles. Frank's satirical posters and independent, entrepreneurial spirit quickly spread his work all over the country, inspiring a whole generation of rock poster artists to start doing silk screening.



**Art Chantry (1990s ):**

Art Chantry grew up in Tacoma, WA, and moved to Seattle right before grunge “hit” in the ‘90s. Working at publications like “The Rocket”, and doing artwork for record labels like Sub Pop, Art’s fingerprint was on just about every album cover and magazine from the “grunge” era. Art’s work often comprised of old American advertisements, re-purposed to promote not-so-mainstream rock bands. Today, Art is internationally recognized as not only representing the “look” of the grunge era, but also as one of America’s most innovative and talented graphic designers.



**COOP (1990s ):**

COOP was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and moved to Los Angeles in the late ‘80s. In L.A., he immediately started doing work for bands like Nirvana, Soundgarden, The Sex Pistols, and many others. Heavily influenced by the hot rod culture of the ‘60s, COOP cites Big Daddy Roth, Robert Williams, and R. Crumb as influences. COOP’s work can be seen in the permanent collection at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame museum in Cleveland, and has been exhibited in galleries, internationally.



**EMEK (contemporary):**

EMEK comes from a family of fine artists, and is often regarded as one of the most highly sought-after rock poster artists of this era. Having done work for The Beastie Boys, Queens of the Stone Age, Nine Inch Nails, Erykah Badu, and just about every other mainstream mega-band, EMEK has managed to build a following which often causes long lines at rock poster events. “As a child, my parents threw the television out of the house and encouraged us to have creative art time”, says EMEK, crediting his attention to detail and approach to his craft to his artistic upbringing.



**Tara McPherson (contemporary ):**

Crowned the “princess of poster art” by ELLE magazine, Tara’s work has appeared in numerous publications including “The Art of Modern Rock” and “SWAG”. Based out of NYC, she has worked on several international image campaigns, including ones for Pepsi and Ray-Ban sunglasses. Tara’s posters were also most recently featured in the Oscar award winning movie, *Juno*.



**Jay Ryan and Mat Daly (contemporaries ):**

Jay and Mat both work at Jay Ryan’s poster shop, “The Bird Machine”, which is based out of Chicago, IL. Jay has been heavily involved in the American Poster Institute (API), and the organization of poster events such as Flatstock, which is about to have it’s 18th show. Jays posters, often comprising of whimsical and imaginative animals, have been done for an array of bands like The Shins, The Decemberists, Andrew Bird, and Fugazi.

*Additional information about the other artists in the film, and links to their websites can be found at:  
<http://www.AmericanArtifactMovie>*

*Other interviews in the movie include the authors of “The Art of Modern Rock”; Paul Grushkin and Dennis King, as well as collectors, and various musicians, including Phish (Mike Gordon), the Dead Kennedys (Jello Biafra), The Avengers (Penelope Houston), The English Beat (Dave Wakeling), and more.*

*The film’s soundtrack includes an array of independent and mainstream musicians including The Butthole Surfers, The Avengers, The Slackers, and Andrew Bird.*



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**Director's Bio:  
Merle Becker**

Producer / director Merle Becker has worked in the television and film industry for 17 years.

As a graduate of Syracuse University's TV / Radio / Film Production program in 1993, she has since been recognized for her work on numerous television shows, music videos, and electronic press kits for both independent and major label musicians.

Drawn to pop culture and music-related subject matter, Merle's credits include MTV's "Beavis And ButtHead", "Total Request Live", "The 59th Annual TONY Awards on CBS", Comedy Central's "Tough Crowd With Colin Quinn", and countless other shows for Fuse, VH1, and MTV.

She finished her first film, "Saving Newburgh", an award-winning documentary about the political turmoil in the upstate city of Newburgh, NY, in 2004, and she was also involved in the editing of "Rising Low", a documentary about bass players (featuring, among others, Warren Haynes and Phil Lesh).

Her film work is also part of the permanent collection at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, OH.

Merle began work on "American Artifact" in 2005, and completed the film in 2009.

She is based out of NYC, and runs an independent film company, Freakfilms, Inc.

*High resolution movie posters, stills, and other images are available at:*  
**www.AmericanArtifactMovie.com**  
*(under PRESS, DOWNLOAD CORNER)*