

RICK RIETVELD



Rick in studio

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Name: Rick Rietveld
Hometown: SoCal

Since his days as the man behind the scenes for the Maui and Sons apparel line in the 1980s, Rick Rietveld has become an icon in the surfing-art subculture. His work has always been imitated, but never replicated. He's one of the best known surreal artists and continues to maintain a balance of surf/work creativity in today's surf culture.

At what point in your life did you become a true artist and what got you started?

My Mom is an artist and since I can remember I used to watch her draw and paint and was in awe that she could create incredible artwork with just a pencil and paper. When I was 10 she would take me to sidewalk art shows to sell her work on the street. I would sit at a table next to her drawings and paintings and sketch cartoons of all kinds of things like crazy Hot Rods and surfers riding waves, etc. People started to notice my artwork and offered to buy a few of them! The idea that I could make money drawing wacky stuff got me hooked, so I was into it early on. I was blessed and fortunate to have a Mother who encouraged me and never stopped telling me that an art career was an honorable pursuit.

What influence did surfing have on the canvas?

I was into surfing images before I learned to surf. The first dollar I made at the sidewalk art shows was used to buy a Surfer magazine in 1967. In fact, I just bought the same issue at a collectibles show. As soon as I saw it on top of a stack of old surf mags, my mind went back to the day when I first saw it at a surf shop. The cover was a cool shot of Dickie Moon going left at Blacks taken from the La Jolla's Scripps pier. In case you're curious, it was Volume 8, Number 5, 1967. I memorized every word and picture and copied most of them in pencil and paint. After I learned to surf, it became my mission to translate the euphoric feeling the ocean and surfing gave me into a visual that others could actually feel as they looked at it. I'm still trying different techniques but it's a challenge to paint something that only a surfer could really understand.



Top to bottom: Electric Sky; Road Queen; Tikinator. Left: 1980's Rick surfing Newport Beach, California

Who influenced your style?

The first surf art that inspired me was a two-page spread in that first surfer magazine I just mentioned; the section was called Surftoons. There were a dozen different surf cartoons by many artists. The art was funny and pretty well done but in the back of the magazine was an ad to sell a Surfer mag sticker with Rick Griffin's famous Murphy character. The character and skill in which it was done amazed me. Rick Griffin's art influenced my style for years until I developed my own style which, hopefully, keeps evolving.

You have a sense for the surreal. Is there a reason you went that route?

I have always been fascinated by things that are a little out of the norm. My early teens started at the height of '60s Pop Culture where psychedelic posters were everywhere, so I was heavily influenced by music and the art that was created for it.

The days of Maui and Sons, what was that like?

In the beginning it was a lot of fun because we were doing whatever we wanted to do creatively in garment design and my artwork. I was stoked to have a way to show my art through t-shirts, fabric prints and through the magazines. We used my paintings for advertising in the mags. In our minds a t-shirt, a piece of fabric sewn into a piece of clothing, a page in a publication, are all just a canvas for creativity. The Surf Industry was in a fast growing mode then and we were going full blast all the time. We decided to do a few billboards around L.A. and back then the medium was painted on large pieces of wood. That was a great canvas because they were about 30 x 90 feet. I designed 4 of them that were eventually placed on Melrose, Santa Monica Blvd, etc. I was asked to come to the factory where they were painted and sign each one of them which was an incredible experience because these things were gigantic! Plus seeing my art at that scale was a surreal experience in itself. We won a prestigious Obie award for one that was an image of an American Indian with sunglasses riding a shark and wearing a full feather headdress aiming his bow and arrow at our logo on a white background. We really didn't know that it was that big of a deal and the award was like an Oscar in the advertising world so we missed the big award ceremony in New York and the Billboard rep eventually brought the trophy to the office for us. I learned a great deal from that experience as I went from having fun as an artist with total creative freedom

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to being a Creative Director with 6 artists under my supervision. It was a completely different thing altogether and the direction of the Maui and Sons brand was taken away from us by money complications and new management. I decided to move on and called Bob McKnight at Quiksilver whom I knew from surfing and around town and asked if he needed any art. He said sure and kept me busy for a year doing posters for events, t-shirt art, fabric prints, etc. Then I started my own brand Rietveld USA in 1995.

How's business going with Rietveld Clothing?

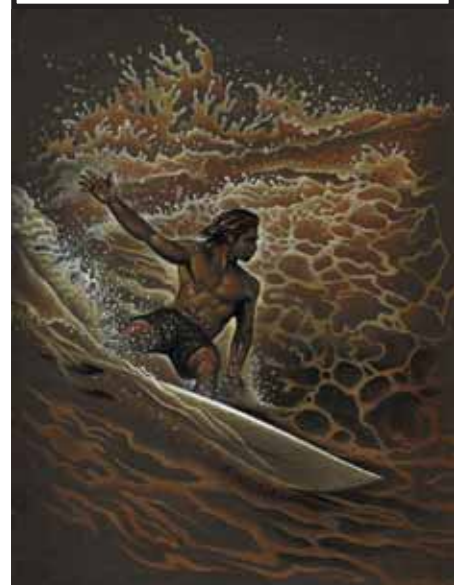
It's been fun and hard at the same time. Having total creative freedom is great but the pressures of the business side affects my creativity and sometimes it's hard to focus on the art. We have had our up and downs but basically we are doing well internationally and are currently in between licenses in the USA.

Who's your big market for your art?

Europe has always been a great market for me even during the Maui days. Art is regarded highly there and they treat me like a King when I go there, so I love it there. I have sold many of my originals to Europeans. That's always seemed strange to me since it seems like the surf culture is stronger here in the States.

Where's Rick Rietveld going from here?

Our website www.RietveldUSA.com is having great success. We started doing e-commerce in Europe and it's doing well. We hope to get it going here in the States soon. I am also working on my fine art and I just started selling limited edition prints. My love and passion is in surfing and art and I will continue to follow that.



Top to bottom: Leilani; Weekend Warriors; Tonga Surfer.