



Art Etched into Surfboard - Peter Spacek

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by Pat Rogers

Surfboards aren't just for riding the waves. Ask artist Peter Spacek. An architecture office doesn't only have to focus on construction design. Ask obrArchitecture in San Diego, CA. Their office space is equally divided between their architecture studio and their non-commercial art gallery.

Located within an arts district with an ocean lifestyle that permeates the area, Spacek's scrimshaw art on surfboard was a natural for a show on surfing sought by obrArchitecture. After taking a closer look at Spacek's art, the firm gave Spacek his first solo show on the West Coast.

"Scratching the Surface" presents art inspired by the experience of surfing. Most of the works were made by scratching into the fiberglass surfaces of weathered surfboards to create color-drenched compositions.

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"Deep Blue Drop" by Peter Spacek. Engraved ink on surfboard fiberglass.

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The works are infused with motion, often expressed through a single line running through the composition. Some artworks feature the recognizable figure of a solo surfer intently tuned into the waves around him. Other works are abstract with relaxed lines seemingly circling over ponds of color. The loose marks conjure lazy days of watching wind billow the surface of still waters or upward gazing for white expanding lines drawn by airplanes as they transverse a skyscape.

The art on view in "Scratching the Surface" explores the nature of wave riding. Some artworks include a surfer and some are without and present a more traditional seascape or littoral imagery.

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"red yellow green ride" by Peter Spacek. Engraved ink on fiberglass from three vintage surfboards. Three 12 x 12 inch panels.

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Spacek's art mingles contrasts with ease. Past and current are joined. So is natural and the

manmade. Some of the sense of antiquity arises from the re-purposed surfboard fiberglass that has its own history, explained Spacek. The “canvas” for his art is aged and brittle but has the luminosity and patina that can only be acquired through years of exposure to sun, surf and sand, he said.

Interested in combining his passion for surfing with his art, he began experimenting with ways to make art on reclaimed surfboards. In 2009, Spacek found success and discovered a way to effectively use traditional scrimshaw methods to carve art into vintage surfboard surfaces. Scrimshaw is an antiquated technique where the surface of a material, such as whale teeth or bone, is scratched with a sharp tool and the indentation filled with ink to create a drawing.



“Nick Arc Carve” by Peter Spacek. Engraved ink on surfboard fiberglass.

Spacek’s art grabbed the attention of obrArchitecture architect-principal Garrick Oliver. The combination of the rough feel created by carving and inking into the smooth surface of the fiberglass surfboard was appealing, said Oliver.

“The greatest attractor for me to Peter’s work, and to much of the current surf related work, is this rustic/rough feeling to a lot of it,” said Oliver. “I love the contrast between the actual act of surfing and tools of surfing, which I consider to be fluid, glassy, smooth....and the grainy art that accompanies it.”

The contrast jives with architectural design favored by obrArchitecture.

“We have a fairly modern look to our work, but love to use raw, unfinished materials,” said Oliver. “Peter’s work really looks like it should be here all the time.”

Making art on wizened surfboards begins with a twist on a historic technique before leaping to the contemporary.

“I seem to be going in two directions, a more traditional approach that resembles engravings or lithographic etchings, and also a simpler graphic approach, trying to convey the essence of riding waves through scribed lines that came from sketches I do with my eyes closed,” said Spacek.



“Straight Drop” by Peter Spacek. Engraved ink on surfboard fiberglass.

Spacek's art is infused with sensations accumulated through decades of surfing.

"I imagine myself riding a wave with the pen recording my path on paper," he said. "The trick is to not lose the fluidity that I had in my initial sketch when I move to the fiberglass with the etching tools. It needs to be accurate to my experience, if anything feels false or forced, it's discarded. If I get a mini-stoke looking at it, it's done."



"Green Cutback" by Peter Spacek. Engraved ink on surfboard fiberglass.

BASIC FACTS: "Scratching the Surface" - Etched Images on Surfboard Fiberglass is on view from Sept 8 to Oct 11, 2012 at obrArchitecture, 3817 Ray Street, San Diego, CA. An artist reception was held on Sept 8 during the 'Ray at Night' Art Walk.

obrArchitecture was founded in 2008. Art and community events are an integral part of the architectural studio. Their Ray Street location was purposefully selected to be at the heart of the a strong arts based community, said Oliver. Art exhibited in their gallery represents a vast cross-section of art and artists. Every month, they host a monthly event where the street is closed to cars and their gallery-studio is open to the public.

obrArchitecture does not take commission on art sales. Instead, exhibiting artists donate a single work to the firm. Each November, the works are auctioned to benefit area arts-related non-profit groups. www.obrarchitecture.com.

Peter Spaek first solo show of scrimshaw art premiered in 2010 at OutEast Gallery in Montauk, NY.

In 2011 Spacek created scrimshaw imagery for a film about the first documented black surfer at Malibu, *12 Miles North*. His art was displayed at the film's premiere, the centerpiece being a scrimshawed 1950's surfboard illustrating the film's story.

Spacek is also an accomplished illustrator and cartoonist. His illustrations have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Barrons*, *Surfer* and *The Surfers Journal* among others. A selection of his satirical cartoons have been collected in the book *Surf and Mirth*.

Spacek, a serious waterman, has traveled the world extensively chasing waves, drawing, etching and surfing what he's found. Spacek is based in East Hampton, NY and Leucadia, CA. His art can be seen at www.peterspacek.wordpress.com and at Facebook /peterspacek art.



Photo of Peter Spacek.

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