



Times Two: Process (and Design) Takes Center Stage in New Book by Steve Miller

August 22, 2019

by Pat Rogers

Sometimes, one book isn't enough. In Steve Miller's case, the chance to choreograph two books on his work allowed for the first book to focus on his completed fine art—primarily appearing on canvas, pedestal and paper—followed by a second book that reveals what happens when art breaks loose and revels in a free style approach guided by the artist.

"Surf/Skate: Art and Board Life," published in May 2019 by Glitterati Editions, traces the evolution from fine art exhibited in galleries and museums to Miller's breakthrough into surfing and skateboard culture. Miller introduces and celebrates the book's release in The Hamptons in a Book Signing and Art Party at Keyes Art in Sag Harbor on Friday, August 23, 2019, from 6 to 8 p.m.

Miller's first book, "[Radiographic: X-Ray Photo Invention](#)" presents a trail of Miller's abstract and figurative art with inspiration found in the wilds of the Brazilian rain forests or complex math formulas developed by scientists or portraits of endangered (or delicate) animals, reptiles, flowers, fashion objects and more represented by their skeleton.



"HOP #675" by Steve Miller, June 13, 2014. Inkjet and enamel on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

All of Miller's art incorporates x-ray technology as part of a multi-step process that can include photography, printmaking and painting. His art has an ecological bent and explores what it means to have the earth, its inhabitants and human-made objects intersect and interact. Click [here](#) to read more.

His new book, "Surf/Skate" continues his journey as his art moves into design. Conceived while his first book, Radiographic: X-Ray Photo Inventions, was still in production, "Surf/Skate: Art and Board Life" was always intended to peel back the art making process.

Told through photographs that capture moments in time and move in a non-linear fashion, photographs include portraits of fashions, surfboards and skateboards. Images offer unscripted moments from surf and skate culture that relay the way his designs resonate with those wearing them or how his skeletal portraits of snakes, iguanas, piranhas connect when confronted with the

wilds of the ocean or concrete jungle. The monograph begins with a Foreword by Michael Tolkin, which is a memoir on his relationship with skateboards.

The first book is the traditional art book everyone wants,” Steve Miller said in a recent phone interview. “The second one is more unfiltered and more interested in the world and not just the art gallery. It provides the background and energy that went into the making of the art and the art behind the scenes. If you look at both books, you really get a sense of what I’m all about. Both books are the same size, so it’s like they are Volume One and Volume Two.”



“School of the Abyss” by Steve Miller, May 2015. Pigment dispersion and silk-screen on canvas, 79 x 113 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

The new book firmly establishes Miller as a new brand of artist: one who maintains a fine art practice and a commercial one that doesn’t shy away from integrating art with design. His move into designs on skateboards was facilitated by environmental durational artist and painter [Adam Stennett](#), Miller said, who recommended his art for a skateboard Sennett has made. Miller realized the connection also latched with his ecological ideology and drawing attention to fragile environments. Skateboards also provided a new audience for his art that was broader than collectors patronizing fine art shows, he said.

“There are only so many white wall galleries,” Miller said. “It felt so limiting, waiting for one person to decide whether I’m the ice cream of the month and I would be given a show. I decided to take the initiative and get the work out there on coffee mugs and t-shirts and surf boards. To think about that kind of energy—what could happen with so many people seeing your work and sharing it—and what that could possible do for thinking about the environment and our planet. The idea was something I could connect to.”

The heart of “Surf/Skate” is the stories told through the photographs. The book features an array of images made by around 15 photographers, including Miller. The mix of compositions create a charged atmospheric where surprise is a constant. Moments captured runs the gamut from surfing and beach scenes that channel the 1966 surf movie classic “[The Endless Summer](#)” to merchandising images of slick department store window displays in New York City that showcase Miller’s designs on surfboards or skateboards in dramatic fashion.



Steve Miller Surfboards installed at Bloomingdales in NYC

Pictures that capture the pensiveness of making art are woven throughout “Surf/Skate: Art and Board Life.” Photographs depict Miller working in his studio on paintings, preparing surfboards for marketing efforts as well as still life of his studio. A particular effective passage in the book is a mini-narrative series showing the process of prepping and transforming a plain surfboard to accept Miller’s designs that concludes with a casual scene of a (presumably) the newly-minted board drying in the sun with older warrior surfboards from other makers leaning, nearby, against a clapboard garage.

As a whole, “Surf/Skate” achieves Miller’s goal of creating a book that takes readers on a journey behind the merchandise they buy in the store to its origins as an object for art. The photographs are effective in channeling the creative energy innate in instincts used in art making, sports that thrive on split-second decisions, the life force found in the natural world and what it feels like to be immersed in environments where anything can happen.

Steve Miller revealed some of the back stories behind some of the more mysterious images in an email exchange. Some stories are whimsical; others reveal the crossover from fine art to design application; with still others demonstrating the unusual ways designed surfboards can make their way into everyday life. The stories appear first with the images immediately following.

SM: I asked my studio assistant, Tohmi Shiroyama who is an avid skater, to beat up a black skateboard which is documented in Osaka at the beginning of the book. Since the black snake and the white snake boards make a pair called Yin and Yang, he needed to shred a white board as well. In the image below, Tohmi is anticipating the future of the white board which he returned to me and is show afterwards.



Tohmi Shiroyama after receiving a brand new skateboard. The design is based on a fine art piece by Steve Miller. Courtesy Glitterati Editions.



Dueling Scuffed Skateboards. Courtesy Glitterati Editions.

SM: *Why is this surf board in a tree? In fact, it's in Cindy Sherman's backyard which she offered as a venue for a benefit for Edwin Von Gal's non-profit Perfect Earth. The board was donated as a raffle item and people were walking around deciding on what to bid and a tree was an easy way to view the x-rays of Amazon turtles.*

It was my intention to make on a surf board to highlight issues about the environment and protecting turtles is essential to insure their survival. Part of Edwina's environmental work was to

plant trees to restore the canopy in Panama so, monkeys and other creatures could have a “highway” to move through land that had been previously cleared. Under these circumstances, a board in a tree canopy was the only solution.



Blue Skateboard in Tree. Photo by Steve Miller. Courtesy Glitterati Editions.

SM: This is the first painting to which I attached a skate deck. The painting started with a layer of white lines that were made with masking tape to evoke the pattern of wires in the slums of Rio. Afterward, I quickly applied a layer of black with a roller from the cooking tray on the left that was full of paint.

When I pulled off the tape, the paint was still wet and the aluminum tray served double duty as a waste basket. The work progressed with a series of white silk screen images of Amazon plants and snakes. The top image of a black palm is from my favorite beach in Serra Grande, Bahia. I used to walk down that beach to visit Kenny Scharf in his outdoor studio.



“Kickback with Skateboard” by Steve Miller, July 2015. Pigment dispersion and silkscreen on canvas, 79 x 67.5 inches. Courtesy Glitterati Editions.



Tape in tray. Courtesy Glitterati Editions.

SM: The photographer Eric Striffler took this photo of Missy Hargraves. Did anyone notice the iguana coffer cup?



Missy Hargraves. Photo by Eric Striffler. Courtesy Glitterati Editions.

SM: *There was only one image that I insisted, with the publisher, that needed to be the lead image of the book. It's on the roll down gate of a surf shop in Arpoador, a region in Rio de Janeiro, on a small peninsula between Ipanema and Copacabana. There is a surf break there that is a local lure.*

On an early morning walk, when the shop was closed, it was strange to see that the sign was not in Portuguese and expressed more than anything the spirit for which I was seeking in the making Surf/Skate.



“Surf Now Apocalypse Later.” Photo by Steve Miller. Courtesy
Glitterati Editions.

BASIC FACTS: Steve Miller’s art can be viewed on his website at www.stevemiller.com. His books and fashions can be found at www.stevemiller.art.

Copyright 2019 Hamptons Art Hub LLC. All rights reserved.