

THE ART

BY ANNAMARIA STEPHENS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRAD SWONETZ
AND JOHN DOLE



WALL STREET From left: Graffiti artist Chor Boogie grabs hold of his work at the New Children's Museum; the aerosol art at Downtown's nouveau Fit Athletic Club.



PURELY LEGAL

Graffiti's second coming hits S.D., from serious galleries to upscale athletic clubs

Back in the day, getting caught with spray cans and paint-stained hands led to a ride in a black and white. But times have changed for aerosol art. In 2006 the Brooklyn Museum staged *Graffiti*, a retrospective featuring 22 large-scale works, as well as two blank walls for visitors to give it their own go. The same year, graffiti artist and nightlife entrepreneur Monsieur André opened the ultra-hip, aerosol-enhanced Hotel Amour in Paris.

Thirty years after its birth, graffiti art is also returning en masse to San Diego. "I can't believe how much things have changed—it's viewed as an actual art form now," says Saratoga Sake, an S.D. graffiti artist who was collared a half-dozen times for vandalism during the '80s. The same work that beefed up his police record now earns him solo shows like the one next month at Escondido's Distinction Gallery.

East Village's pricey new athletic center Fit is a perfect example of spray paint's nouveau-chic appeal. Amid the sleek décor and streamlined machines, a vibrant graffiti wall adds a much-needed infusion of street-cred flair to the swank space. Nearby at Bar Basic, an artsy set descends every Tuesday (except when the Padres are at home) for "Graffiti," a night featuring everything from hip-hop dancers and tattoo demos to DJ-spun

beats—and of course, live painting. "Graffiti is a great fit for Basic's urban vibe," says owner Jon Mangini.

Graffiti's growing role in contemporary art is celebrated at Downtown's New Children's Museum. The forward-thinking curatorial team commissioned the youth-oriented non-profit arts collective WriterzBlok to paint a graffiti climbing wall on the upper level. A few weeks before the museum opened, artists Chor Boogie and Pose 2 wore masks in a paint-hazed space tented with plastic.

Boogie, a former San Diegan who lives in the Bay Area, has painted all over town, including a mural at 9th and C done with his longtime buddy Sake. He describes his unplanned approach as freestyle. "It's coming mainly from the heart, not the head," he explains.

Pose 2, who originally hails from Philly and was a notable player in that city's early graffiti scene, also worked with WriterzBlok on a murals project at Morse High School. He says the excitement the organization generates in kids is undeniable. "They're hyped," he exclaims. "They want to be down. They want to paint. They want to create."

WriterzBlok is all about legal self-expression. The collective's headquarters in southeast San Diego feature a backyard playground with 10,000 square feet of wall space where visiting school groups can graffiti to their hearts' content. "We developed it as an outlet for kids to stay off the streets and be productive at art," says director Sergio Gonzalez, who joined up with WriterzBlok eight years ago when he was 17 and dabbling in trouble. "They channel their energy in a positive way."

Someday, a handful of those kids might just land their art in hotel lobbies, galleries and museums. The collectors are waiting. ■

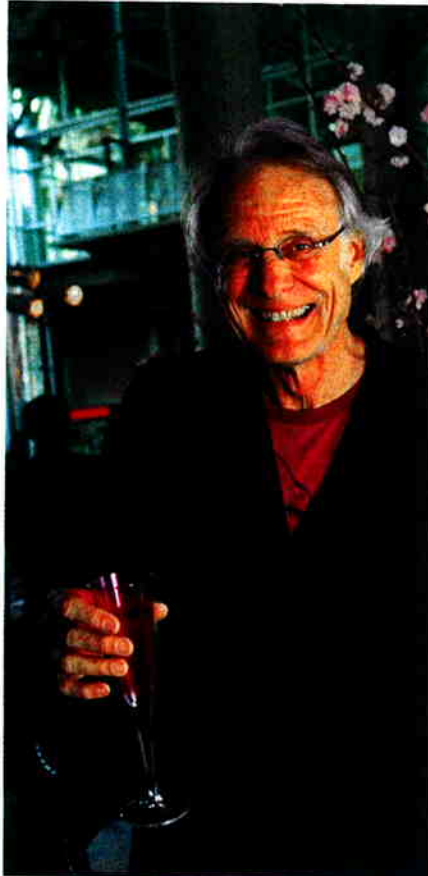
Saratoga Sake, "Vampirina," July 12-Aug. 11 at Distinction Gallery, 317 E. Grand Ave., Escondido, 760.781.5779; New Children's Museum, 200 W. Island Ave., Downtown, 619.233.8792; WriterzBlok, 5010 Market St., Lincoln Park, 619.263.4913; Basic 410 10th Ave., Downtown, 619.236.8980.

SCENE

IN S.D.



Tanya Aquiniga and Todd Beattie



Rob Wellington Quigley



Alberto Caro and Ybeth Meraz



Rex and Steve Romande



Marci Egan, Marie Vickers Horne and Cathy Bass



David and Patsy Marino with Jake and Todd Figi

ALL MY CHILDREN

Artists, tykes and parents thought this day was a myth just like Santa, since the New Children's Museum of San Diego was delayed as long as, oh, say, the city library. But Rob Quigley—the local starchitect behind both projects—was all smiles at this VIP-only reception. The key supporters and big-dollar donors joined the artists who created Downtown's new cutting-edge youth spot—a \$25 million, 50,000-square-foot, eco-friendly empire dedicated to wild creativity and wild fun—to snoop around and tinker before the public grand opening two days later. The verdict? Whether rocking out in the "Porta Party" or thoughtfully sipping Pinot Noir in an igloo made entirely of hardback books, child's play has rarely felt so refined. —JAMES REED



The kids are alright