

As you enter the museum, two of the first images you see illustrate the genre's connection to a much-earlier era, the Art Nouveau period in Paris. A brightly colored poster advertising a 1967 concert in Sausalito by Big Brother and the Holding Company is practically a direct copy of a French poster by Alphonse Mucha advertising an art exposition in Paris in 1896.

"These posters are unique and they're revolutionary," Westford says. "The best posters from the psychedelic era will still be being shown a hundred years from now. They are visually striking and they are emblematic of an era, just as the posters of the Art Nouveau era were."

The work quickly took off in its own stylistic directions. When Bonnie MacLean did a poster for a 1967 concert by The Who, no one cared about legible type any longer; instead, her lettering nearly disappears into the overall image and design.

Among the works here is an iconic Grateful Dead poster — think skeleton and roses — done by Mouse and Kelley for a 1966 concert at the Avalon Ballroom. It's displayed next to an example of one of the seven later forgeries of the same poster. So sought-after is the original work that a near-mint first-edition example went for \$38,500 last year at an international psychedelic poster auction. Like much of the imagery used in psychedelic posters, the skeleton was appropriated; it was copied from British illustrator E.J. Sullivan, who was also influenced by Art Nouveau.

Westford worked for a time selling counter-culture-influenced clothing at a San Francisco boutique, and *Behind the Beyond* includes about 20 examples of 1960s fashion from his fashion collection: yards of bright print dresses, paper dresses and suede buckskin vests, displayed — a little eerily, for me — on mannequins. Wait, I found myself thinking: Didn't my first girlfriend own that paisley sundress?

In a small darkened gallery upstairs, you can enjoy an intense sampling of black-light posters from Westford's collection that are illuminated by the best black lights you may ever see.

*Turned On: The American Blacklight Poster, 1967-71,*

one of two small accompanying exhibits, runs through July 16. Certainly no one I knew in the 1960s had black lights of this caliber. The posters glow so bright I looked closely at them and still had to check in with Westford to be sure I wasn't really looking at high-def digital screens.

All of which brings up the question of drugs. "Do you have to be high to fully appreciate this show?" I asked.

Westford hesitated just slightly.

"If you came into this gallery under the influence, you'd have an elevated state of awareness that might enhance the exhibition," he said, choosing his words carefully. "Well, I'm not advocating that you come to the museum stoned ..."

That also brings up an art history issue. Counterculture art hasn't always been taken seriously by the art establishment, certainly in large part because of this association with LSD and other psychoactive drugs.

Much more favorable attention has been focused on the comic books — think R. Crumb — that came out of the Bay Area of the 1960s than on these brightly mind-bending posters. One reason may be that counter-culture comic books continued to develop, eventually finding respectability under the name "graphic novels," while psychedelic posters, with their druggie associations, were limited to a small geographic region during a small slice of time, from the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967 to the closing of Fillmore West in 1971.

East Coast parochialism was also a factor. Created thousands of miles from the art capital of New York City, and essentially spent within about five years, psychedelic poster art was easily ignored by experts — even though there are strong connections between the posters in this show and the high-brow Pop artists working in New York in those days such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, and Op artists such as Joseph Albers.

A small exhibition of prints upstairs in the Hallie Ford's print room, *The 60s: Pop and Op Art Prints from the Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation*, provides that broader context through Oct. 22.

Finally, isn't all this Summer of Love reflection just a bit precious?

Maybe so, especially if you don't happen to be a Baby Boomer. A similar, if larger, poster show is running through Aug. 20 at the de Young Museum in San Francisco. *The Summer of Love Experience: Art, Fashion, and Rock & Roll* includes 26 posters from Westford's collection, selected from 56 he donated to the museum last year.

The de Young show drew this pointed review from critics Emma Silvers and Sarah Hotchkiss at KQED:

*Let's get one thing out of the way: We are not convinced any of this summer's grand re-telling is necessary. As California natives in our early 30s, we've grown up in the persistent shadow of the Summer of Love, a specter of San Francisco in the sixties as sacred text — the prophets Jerry Garcia, Ken Kesey and Bill Graham untouchable in their retroactive glory...*

*Can we discuss what came after? What bands they influenced, or even what they stood for? Where can their nonconformist message still be felt in present-day San Francisco, where capitalism run amok has made it difficult if not impossible for artists to survive? Put bluntly: Why are we still talking about this?*

Why, indeed?

I loved seeing Westford's posters at the Hallie Ford. But I'm a Boomer, an old fart who still listens to Jimi and Janis and Jefferson Airplane. Much of my response to the show was visceral and emotional, that sense of comfortable recognition you get from revisiting an interesting old friend.

That said, the Hallie Ford show does a good job of presenting the work in an art-historical context. I don't imagine many people with an interest in visual art would fail to find it interesting, however old they might be.

But the question remains: Can Boomers trust anybody under 30?

Westford has his own feelings on the new generation gap.

"If the only people who come to see this show are old hippies, I've failed," he says. ■

FASHION FROM THE LATE '60S AND STANLEY MOUSE AND ALTON KELLEY, 'SKELETON AND ROSES'



TICKET OUTLETS: SAN FRANCISCO THE PSYCHEDELIC SHOP, CITY LIGHTS BOOKS, BALLY LO, CEDAR ALLEY COFFEE HOUSE, NINASTORIA, DISCOUNT RECORDS (North Beach), SANDAL MAKER (North Beach) SAUSALITO BERKELEY MENLO PARK TIDES BOOK SHOP, SANDAL MAKER RECORD CITY, 234 Telegraph Avenue KEPLER'S BOOK STORE

