

Ned Evans: Wet on Wet
By Steve Olson

Once upon the Fifties, somewhere in Burbank, California, right next to the Disney Studios, a kid named Ned, last name Evans, was born.

The son of a nurse and Lockheed Aircraft parts buyer, Evans became one the Valleys' surfing cowboys. Not yet an overdeveloped nightmare, The Val still had orange groves, walnut orchards, small farms and horse ranchos. It was a place where a kid could have the freedom to create and experience different worlds, some real and some imagined. Evans painted and surfed to escape the Valleys heat. An early example of Evans' vision was the eight-wheeled skateboard in 1965. As a Dewey Weber skateboard team rider, he and his buddies decided that they needed more room to capture the feeling of surfing. The eight-wheeler went down on a 14-inch wide, 50-inch long plank of ash. "We were freaks," he says. "In the pre-urethane world, my best friend and I built these huge skateboards to carve on, hang drop knee cutbacks and walk the nose out in the middle of the Valley flats. Before we knew it, we were on the Weber team sliding around trying to do tricks on a hardwood stage, before a surf movie at the Santa Monica Civic auditorium. It was pretty comical stuff—those boards were way to fat for tricking."

At 17, Evans removed himself from the oncoming drug blight, venturing down south to the Laguna Beach surf scene. Studying art at UC Irvine under instructors Robert Irwin, Ed Moses, Larry Bell, and Craig Kaufman and fellow students Chris Burden, Charles Hill, and Alexis Smith, Evans accidentally surrounded himself with an elite group. He was taught by working artists.

At the same time Ned was exploring art and surfing, the 60s rock n' roll world was creaming. Evans recalls going to the infamous shows at the Shrine Auditorium, with artist Sam Francis as the lighting director, LSD running rampant, hours of rock n roll—life would never be the same. "That whole time was like some crazy revolving cycle of surfing, music and art. We were going to these amazing concerts in L.A. where Hendrix or The Who would do two sets each on two stages with totally gone, over the top light show visuals and then after the show at 2 AM. crawling out to the beach to hit the dawn patrol, surf all day, make some art and plan the next excursion."

In '69, Evans did exhibition/installation work at the old Newport Harbor Art Museum, surfing during lunch at 22nd St. in Newport. In 1971 at

the Laguna Beach Art Museum painting competition, Evans received a purchase award. From that day on, Evans knew that Art was his way out of The Regular. Evans did whatever had to be done to keep making art: construction work, art delivery, gallery installations, working for other artists at different studios, bartering paintings for surfboards, materials, clothing—whatever it took, Evans worked it.

Some of his peers left the waves for the more serious side of the art world (read: New York). Ned stayed west, rode waves and painted, taking from the natural influences of the ocean, transferring its movement and energy into an abstract of color, strokes, patterns, and layers.

Moving to Venice, California in '73, Evans met Billy Al Bengston through painter Ed Moses. His gravitation to Billy was obvious due to their shared interest in surfing and abstract painting. “I was close to living in my car, almost completely broke and at the same time jazzed to have someone that liked to go surfing before work and make art everyday offer me a job. I had always tried to marry my two loves.” Working for Bengston, Evans was traveled and surfed from Baja to El Salvador to Hawaii.

In the early-'80s Evans found himself sharing a 40,000 square foot loft studio in downtown L.A. He lasted two years before finding his way back in Venice, planting roots with a marriage and a child. He's been there since.

If the surf is on, you'll probably find Evans surfing Malibu. “The physicality of surfing,” relates Ned, “and the immersion in the medium translates into what happens in the studio. It's not conscious—it just happens for me. I like to immerse myself in the process of the painting and the liquidity of the paint. Everything's done wet-on-wet and it carries right over into a similar sensation when you're surfing. In other words, it's about getting lost, losing the gravitational pull, or at least suspending it all for a moment.”

