

PREFACE

Charles Desmarais
Director



It was a guy thing.

Cars and comix. Sleek, sexy bodies and base humor.

If these were all the custom car craze of the early 1960s had left behind, it might hold some sociological interest. But some other things happened at the same time, in the same place, and thus it became more than just a guy thing—it was a youth thing, a California thing.

California's own adolescence coincided with that of half of America. American art, too, was growing up and taking a predominant place on the international scene.

With floods of cultural hormones pulsing through Southern California's veins, the region became a focal point for American youth—a metaphor for post-pubescent energy and anxiousness and creativity. And so, a craze became something else, with its own language, mores, traditions and art—a culture, customized for its age and geography: Kustom Kulture.

This book and the exhibition it accompanies are a look at Kustom Kulture through the work of three of its central figures and some thirty-five "others" who immersed themselves in it. The project is exactly the sort of innovative approach to the history of art in California upon which the Laguna Art Museum prides itself. I want to thank the many people who have contributed yet another high point in the seventy-five year history of our institution.

First among such contributors is Craig Stecyk, who selected the primary works for the exhibition and wrote the principal text, and whose instincts about the history of the car culture have led to the remarkable product now in the reader's hands. Also essential to this effort were Laguna Art Museum trustee Greg Escalante, without whose organizational genius and witty intelligence this

project never would have happened, and Bolton Colburn, LAM Curator of Collections, who chose and wrote about many of the works in the show.

For the members and trustees of the Laguna Art Museum, I thank the major donors who made this work possible: M. Dolores Milhous and Judy and Stuart Spence. All three of these special people have made important contributions in the past, and we thank them for their continued belief in the art of our time and the Museum's dedication to it.

Jim and Dan Brucker have devoted many years and substantial resources to supporting and collecting the art of Von Dutch, Ed Roth and Robert Williams. We thank them and the other lenders to this project for preserving this important work, and for sharing it with a larger public.

The Laguna Art Museum board and staff rarely receive proper acknowledgement of their many contributions to the Museum and its various efforts, yet nothing the Museum does would be possible without them. We owe a debt of gratitude to them all. Among the staff, I would particularly thank Susan M. Anderson, Curator of Exhibitions, who coordinated the exhibition at the Museum. I would also like to thank Curatorial Assistant Lisa Buck and Colleen Callinan, Assistant to the Director, for their assistance.

Finally, we thank Ed Roth, Robert Williams, the late Von Dutch and the other artists who agreed to participate. It is they who have defined Kustom Kulture.



*Contemporary vehicle by Boyd Coddington reveals the influence of Von Dutch's paint treatment.
Photo courtesy Rod and Custom.*

(Opposite) Robert Williams illustration for Ed Roth Studios, 1967.