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ARTIST CHRIS JOHANSON IS BUILDING THE TRIPPIEST BOARDSHED YOU'VE EVER SEEN AT THE VANS US OPEN

THE BELOVED SAN FRANCISCO ARTIST IS GETTING WEIRD ON THE BEACH IN HUNTINGTON

JULY 24, 2019 BY [SURFER](#)  

There's an artistic renaissance afoot at the Vans US Open of Surfing this year, and the ever-colorful Chris Johanson is building something awesomely weird right there on the sand. If you've paid any attention to the worlds of skateboarding or art over the past few decades, chances are Johanson's work has struck you with its colorful and humorous tongue-in-cheek impressionism, which has graced the bottom of skateboards and the walls of prestigious galleries alike.

This year, Johanson and his friends are installing a trippy board shack on the beach at Huntington for the Vans Duct Tape Festival. Throughout the duration of the Vans US Open of Surfing (Saturday, July 27 through Sunday, August 4) the shack will be stuffed with boards shaped by Dane Reynolds, Leila Hurst, Tosh Tudor, Austin Kanfoush and local Orange County-based shapers. These boards will be free for all to ride each day at the event from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm.

Johanson's piece isn't the only art you'll find around Huntington in the coming days. Huntington's own acclaimed artist and former pro skateboarder Ed Templeton will have a large installation on the sand, not to mention he'll be showing work along with his wife, Deana, as well as Cole Barash, Nolan Hall, Cheryl Dunn, Grant Hatfield and Tobin Yelland at "You Should Have Been Here Yesterday". The gallery show organized by Vans and the photo-based zine collective, Deadbeat Club opens this Friday, July 26 from 7:30 pm to 11:00 pm at the Costa Mesa Conceptual Arts Museum, and it won't be one to miss.

But before things get weird up in Huntington, we rang up Johanson to learn more about his psychedelic board shack and to see what he thinks about this whole surfing trip.

So we hear you've made quite a trippy art piece that doubles as a kind of board shed. Can you tell us a bit about that?

Yeah, It's going to be like a fun, semi-shaded little zone with some art and surfboards inside. My friend Ajax Oakford and I are building it. He's an amazing builder. We're old friends from San Francisco, so it's been fun hanging out and building this environment together.

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

We're making it at Vans' headquarters. We're making it modular so there's potential for it to cruise out to New York and maybe beyond after the US Open.



Photo Credit: Chris Johanson

Johanson is no stranger to trippy structures. He constructed this installation at the San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in 2004.

You're doing all of the art for the Vans Duct Tape series this year. Did you go to Portugal for the first event? If so, what was that experience like?

Yeah, I went to the Portugal Duct Tape Fest. I'm in this band called Sun Foot. We played and did all of this pro surfer stuff, it was a ton of fun. I met all all these interesting people. I took yoga classes with all these interesting surfers. It was really trippy—a really cool scene.

I usually hang more in the visual art world because I've been doing it for a long time. My roots are in skateboarding, not in surfing, but I dig surfing. Art's my main life-thing but it's fun to trip on this surfing thing. I never imagined I'd do something at the US Open of Surfing, it's pretty cool.

There's so much humor in your artwork, and surf culture often feels ripe for poking fun. Do you ever get inspiration for your art from things you experienced around surfing?

Right now, everything in the world is so ripe, not just surfing. There's the weirdness of all this fake news in the world. Actual real misinformation is so weird. So I kind of made a funny little thing on this structure where there's an alien telepathically communicating peaceful thoughts to the people at the contest. The alien is reminding them to be careful because they're just visitors to Mother Ocean and to respect all her aquatic children.

I wanted to make this piece so I could have a wall to write one-liners about how the ocean has got a big trash island made out of plastic the size of Texas in it. That is so hectic. A lot of surfers know that, but a lot of people that come to town, tourists and stuff, don't. It's a good opportunity to plant some seeds about environmentalism and love for the ocean. Maybe it will remind people that it's not a good idea to buy a bunch of stuff made out of plastic. Hopefully it makes a gentle statement—humor is a great way to do that and I do it often. I love the ocean and I love the idea of more homeostasis between people, plants and animals. One way to do that is buy creating less plastic.

Is it sometimes hard to walk the line between humor and important messaging?

I've made some pieces where the emotional arc of the show has been pretty hectic. Especially when I was younger. I was way into my opinions and they kind of manifested their way into my work. It could be pretty brutal at times because I was a pretty angry young person. I had a lot of anxiety and stuff. That anxiety and humor would sometimes dance together in my work and the message would be pretty brutal. But you mellow out when you get older and you get more nuanced. You have a little bit more compassion for people with different perspectives.

Everything is so polarized right now on a totally new level that it almost seems barbaric. I'm so shocked by how angry people are politically, it's so hectic. In spite of that, I just try to have common ground, look for solutions and have peaceful thoughts.

Maybe Wahington D.C. should be the next stop for your US Open modular structure.

[Laughs] It's so funny man! One time I was asked by NASA's art program to do a piece for them. This is how much of an asshole I was: I told the NASA gallery worker, "You know what? I don't like NASA! The arms race, the space junk... Forget it, man! I don't want to have an art piece at NASA." That was like such a missed opportunity for me. That's how opinionated I was when I was younger [laughs]. I could have made such a beautiful piece and it could have been addressing some things in a totally non-aggressive, non-finger-pointy way. That opportunity will never come up again. It's a trip.

This US Open piece is a mellow piece though. My friend, Jeff den Broeder is helping us build it, too. He's an environmental filmmaker and lifelong surfer. This whole project is just like a fun way to get old friends to hang out and to drop in a few seeds about environmental thoughts in a non-aggressive and non-partisan way. It's a good way to get some thoughts out there without bumming people out too much.

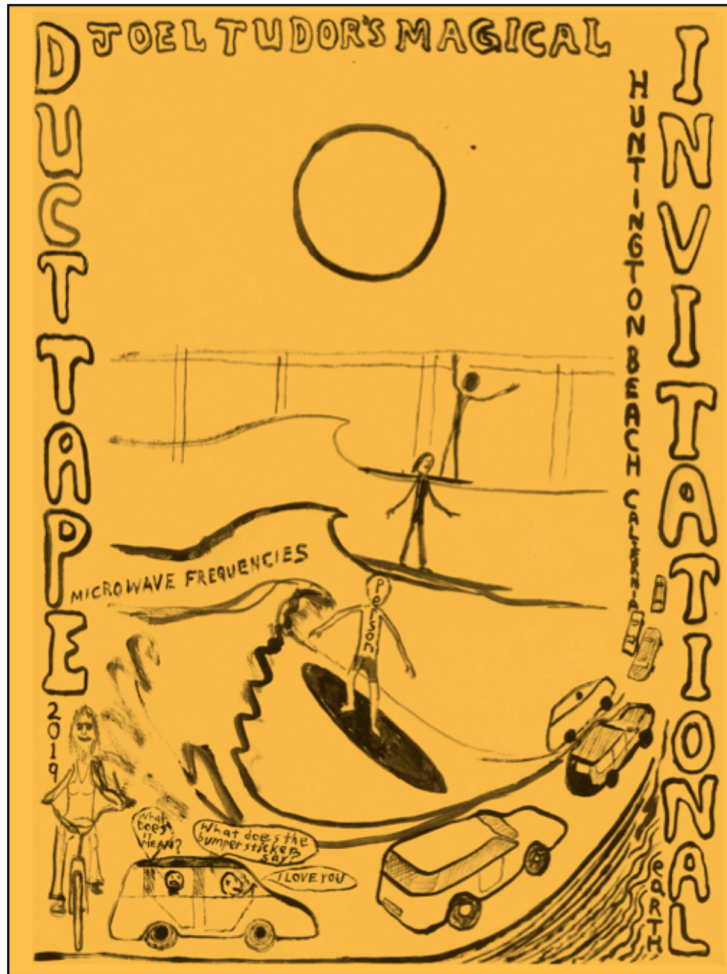


Photo Credit: Chris Johanson
Johanson's work for the Duct Tape Invitational

As an established artist, what advice would you give to artists out there trying to find their voice?

To those trying to be artists out there, education is really important. School is everywhere. There're art communities everywhere, too. And if there isn't an art community where you're at, then build one. Artists are generally pretty nice. Building an art community is really easy because people like to share their art and what comes around goes around. If there are no galleries, then have a show in a garage or a café. Cafés are some of the best places to show art. Just build it up from there. There are many ways to get your art out. It's art for art's sake and it's accumulative. It takes a lifetime, hours and hours of doing, making and meditating on the work to, in my opinion, make something that you care about sharing. The more you do it, the deeper relationship you'll have with your work.

Are you excited to take any of the Duct Tape Fest boards that they're loading up your shed with for a surf?

If there's a longboard, then yeah. I'm not like a super athletic surfer. I like small waves, point breaks, cruising and doing my thing.