

FROM THIS EPISODE

Just as the L.A. Weekly and L.A. Times have written that the downtown arts district is too pricey for artists and galleries, a new arts district is evolving near West Adams. [The Landing](#), a 2,800-square-foot space on Jefferson Boulevard will specialize in showing artists with notable history who have faded from public awareness. The gallery is a new venture for Gerard O'Brien, who has long demonstrated a similar support for 20th century designers, craftsman and some artists at his Melrose Avenue store, [Reform](#).

The debut features the sculpture and paintings of J.B. Blunk, (1926-2002), an artist and craftsman working mainly in the Northern California town of Inverness. Working with a chainsaw and wood-working tools, Blunk carved substantial, suggestive sculptures from the trunks of mature trees that he found in the forests around Inverness, where he lived for half a century. Giant, gnarled burl is left rough and natural in parts, planed and polished in others. Others are bowed and honed as arches.



J.B. Blunk, "Untitled," 1991

Acrylic on redwood

Photo: Daniel Dent

Blunk's sculptures were shown by O'Brien at [Blum and Poe](#) in 2010. This exhibition includes his paintings, which have not been seen before. Often executed on slabs of wood roughly finished by chainsaw, they are painted in white, black and gray, neutral tones that bring out the surface texture but also refer to Blunk's origins as a ceramic artist.



J.B. Blunk, "Hawk Arch," c. 1975

Carved cypress

Photo: Joshua White

Blunk had the sort of extraordinary existence that used to define being an artist. After studying ceramics at UCLA with Laura Andreson, Blunk went to serve in the Korean War. After, he went to Japan and while visiting a craft

shop, happened to meet the great sculptor Isamu Noguchi, who so liked his work, he arranged an exhibition of it. He introduced Blunk to other notable Japanese potters, with whom he apprenticed for two years.



J.B. Blunk, "Mage," 1983

Carved redwood

Photo: Joshua White

When Blunk returned to California in 1954, Noguchi also arranged an introduction to the British Surrealist painter Gordon Onslow-Ford, then living in Inverness. When Blunk helped Onslow-Ford complete a complicated roof design for his new house, the elder painter asked him to stay on in Inverness, eventually giving him part of his property on which to build his own house. Blunk's skill working with wood led him to make furniture until 1962 when he began using the chainsaw as a tool in monumental wood sculpture. Thanks to the support of landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, he made large scale public seating for a number of institutions and was included in many craft exhibitions but by the 1970's, he wanted to pursue his art as pure form.

This exhibition includes work mostly from that period and it is a marvel how Blunk retained the living quality of the tree while transforming it as art. Though the sculptures remain his primary success, the paintings have a poetic impact, like Zen works that are done effortlessly to retain the essence of the gesture.

The show has been extended through January 23, 2016.



*Aaron Curry, "Creator Creator," 2015
Painted aluminum and stainless steel
131 7/8 x 127 1/2 x 85 7/16 inches (335 x 323.9 x 217 cm)
Photo: Hunter Drohojowska-Philp*

Is there a connection between this deceased modernist and upstart sculptor Aaron Curry, born in 1972, now having a show at [David Kordansky](#)? Curry may work in acidic colors and surfaces but his forms always referenced the sculpture of early modernists like Noguchi, Miro, Calder. His most recent sculptures on view at David Kordansky have elucidated that heritage since

they are executed in flat black sheet metal and fiberglass with conical, crescent and spiraling forms activating the space around them.



*Aaron Curry, "Bearth," (alternate view), 2015
Acrylic gouache on canvas
102 x 108 x 3 1/8 inches (259.1 x 274.3 x 7.9 cm)
Photo: Hunter Drohojowska-Philp*

The acidic color that Curry has applied to the surfaces of earlier sculptures is now confined to his paintings, which are both seductive and off-putting,

layers of radiant phosphorescent colors, daubed and dripping, on layered backgrounds of intentionally awkward shapes. As implied by the show's title, *Starfuker*, they refer to the cosmos and have a scintillating quality though Curry is not inclined to award pleasure easily. He wants viewers to work for it. On view through January 16, 2016.