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The Fine Art of Surfboarding

UP FRONT: ART
By Susan Carpenter
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Ask surfers, and they'll tell you: Surfing is an art form. In the art exhibition "FLOW," at the Peter Blake Gallery in Laguna Beach, the surfboard itself is also art -- a canvas of sorts for the works of Raymond Pettibon, Alison Saar, Robbie Conal and others. More than 20 fine artists contributed photographs, paintings, graphic arts and other images, each of which is embedded into fully functional surf- and skimboards.

Curated by Dianna Cohen, an artist best known for her sculptures with recycled plastic bags, "FLOW" dates back 3 1/2 years, when professional surfer Takuji Masuda told Cohen her art would look beautiful on a longboard. That got Cohen thinking -- not about putting her own work on a board but images from her favorite artists. Enlisting the help of surfboard manufacturer Hobie, the idea became a reality last fall.

Each board in the show is made from a Clark Foam blank and hand-carved by Hobie shapers Terry Martin and Pierre "The Fly" Van Swaye. Fully functional for riding, the 22 surfboards and six skimboards range in price from \$3,500 to \$15,000.

"People have been decorating surfboards for forever, but many of the ones I've seen tend to be airbrushed. It looks like a picture of a volcano in Hawaii, and it looks like it could be on the side of your van," said Cohen, 40, a Southern California native who's been surfing for the last 10 years. "There are a lot of attractive boards out there. I just don't think anyone's explored it from this perspective."