

ART & EXHIBITS

Unearthed Grateful Dead pool party photos debut at North Bay museum exhibition

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“Jerry Garcia at Olompali, 1966.”
Photo: Herbie Greene 1966

Herbie Greene would not have brought his camera to the Grateful Dead pool party if a band member hadn't mentioned that he could. He was a fashion photographer with a side interest in album cover portraits. He didn't shoot concerts, and he didn't shoot parties.

But this one he did, on request, and 54 summers later his strikingly candid and unaffected party prints will make their exhibition debut at “Marin's Rock Art Scene,” a rock 'n' roll photography, film and poster exhibition that opens Saturday, Sept. 12, at the Marin Museum of

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The show aims to prove that the Summer of Love did not happen in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury in 1967. That was just the public aftershock. Instead, it suggests, the Summer of Love happened in 1966 at Rancho Olompali, a historic but run-down country estate the Dead rented in Novato.

The main body of evidence to propel that thesis are the images Greene took on that one day in June.



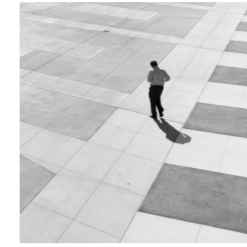
"Two girls at a party at Olompali, 1966."
Photo: Herbie Greene 1966

"It was the first event of its kind for the nudity and bands playing outside and all that," says the now 78-year-old photographer. "There is a direct line from Olompali to Woodstock."

Greene has been plotting out that line for a book he is working on to be titled "Rebirth of a Nation." That's why it was fresh in his mind when he was tracked down by museum officials all the way to Maynard, Mass., where he has lived for 20 years. The request was for any images that represent the impact Marin County has had on the world of rock 'n' roll. Since Greene lived for a time in Marin, it could have been the cover image he shot for "Surrealistic Pillow," Jefferson Airplane's 1967 album. But that would be too obvious.

"I told them I want to show Olompali because nobody has ever seen

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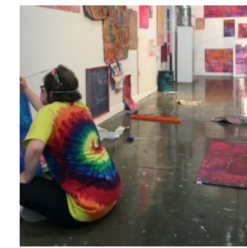
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them,” he says. “It was a seminal event, and it was just random luck that I photographed it.”



“Grateful Dead concert at Olompali, 1966.”

Photo: Herbie Greene 1966

It was also random luck that he met Jerry Garcia in 1965. Greene was living in North Beach when he’d followed the twangy sound of bluegrass into a club called Coffee ‘n’ Confusion. Between sets he got to chatting with the band’s banjo player, who turned out to be Garcia.

Greene started making trips down the Peninsula to hear Garcia’s other band, the Warlocks, who were just starting out. He shot a portrait of them for the cover of their first album. But he was still mainly a fashion photographer, and after he finished work at Magnin’s or Cable Car Clothiers in Union Square, he’d go out to the Haight-Ashbury to make the rounds of the band houses.

“We would just hang,” he says. “I didn’t even carry a camera, which was regretful.”

The Warlocks later became the Grateful Dead and moved to the Haight-Ashbury. Greene also moved there, to a room above the Psychedelic Shop. He had a job as stage manager of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, which put him in the orbit of its manager Bill Graham, but the details and chronology escape him.

“I’m not sure how all of that happened,” he says, “and I doubt if I will ever remember.”



Herbie Greene signs prints at home in July.
Photo: Ilze Greene

According to Grateful Dead historian Dennis McNally, the band left San Francisco for Los Angeles in January 1966 to pursue success in the music industry. When that didn't play out, the band came home and, on a lark, took a six-month summer rental at Olompali, a century-old adobe mansion with outbuildings, a swimming pool and vast grounds for horseback riding, just west of Highway 101.

"You can think of Olompali as the Haight's country getaway," McNally says. "There was a scene that was wonderful and successful and fun and on a small scale."

Greene was invited to the big slumber party at Olompali as a friend, not a photographer. He brought along his Hasselblad and the presence of mind to carry extra rolls of black-and-white film.

"I figured I would take a picture of the band or something," he recalls. But there wasn't just one band to take a picture of as the party got going. They were all there – the Airplane, Big Brother & the Holding Company, Quicksilver Messenger Service and the Charlatans.





Grace Slick at Olompali Ranch, 1966.
Photo: Herbie Greene 1966

Greene had been the first photographer on the San Francisco music scene and was the only photographer at the party. He was able to get unguarded and un-styled images that were never again available to a rock photographer. He got Garcia without a beard and without a shirt, and Grace Slick without makeup.

“Herbie is one of the superb portrait photographers ever,” said McNally, “and the live, unposed shots from Olompali make up an essential document of an extraordinary moment in time.”

Soon after this moment, the scene became too big and started to self-destruct. First came the Human Be-In at Golden Gate Park, in January 1967, followed by the ultra-commercial Summer of Love and the big business of rock shows at the Fillmore and the Avalon. By then there were other shooters on the scene with sharper elbows than Greene.

“**Jim Marshall** would kick down a dressing room door to get a photograph,” Greene says. “I couldn’t do that. It is too intrusive.”

Not wanting to intrude by publishing his images, he stashed them away for 20 years. Then he sneaked one or two into a 1987 show titled “Portraits of the Acid Age: San Francisco’s Rock Scene, 1966-69” at the Robert Koch Gallery, and that was the end of it.



Janis Joplin
Photo: Herbie Greene 1966

But way back in the 1970s, he had given San Francisco Symphony publicist Nancy Rehkopf a signed print of Janis Joplin wearing a top hat. Rehkopf went on to become executive director of MarinMOCA, and when she decided to produce a rock exhibition, Greene was the first name she thought of.

“That early image of Janis, so fresh-faced and smiling at the

future, was the impetus for putting together this show,” Rehkopf said. As it turns out, that image, Rehkopf’s personal copy, is one of seven Greene images in the show, and the only vintage print. The other six, of the party at Olompali, are freshly printed by Greene.

There are additional images of his, spliced into the 2018 documentary film “Olompali: A Hippie Odyssey,” which involves events after the Dead

vacated the property and it became a genuine commune. This led to tragedy and Olompali eventually became a state historic park. The film tells the whole story going back to a Miwok village. It will screen on a continuous loop in the lobby and lead to Greene's Olompali images that open onto the larger show.

"Herb's photos set the groundwork for Marin becoming a haven for artists and musicians," says Meghan O'Callaghan, who curated the show. She was unsuccessful in researching the precise date of the party or even the day of the week. It could have been a Monday and the same group would have been there.

"That's the beauty of it," she says. "It reflects the freedom of the era."

The main gallery contains 50 items by a variety of artists, each with wall text that relates it to Marin.



Ashleigh Sumner's portrait of Tupac Shakur, in acrylic and multimedia, is called "I see no changes."

Photo: Ashleigh Sumner, Marin MOCA

Ashleigh Sumner's mixed-media painting of the late hip-hop pioneer Tupac Shakur links him to Tamalpais High School in Mill Valley, which he attended in the late 1980s. Stanley Mouse, one of the big four of psychedelic poster art, is represented by a poster for the October 1966 Peace Concert at Mount Tamalpais Amphitheater, which may be the earliest poster for a Marin show.

Big Brother drummer Dave Getz's photo montage of Joplin, titled "Love Is Like a Ball and Chain," represents art created by a musician, as does Joan Baez's montage of her late sister, Mimi Fariña, who lived in Mill



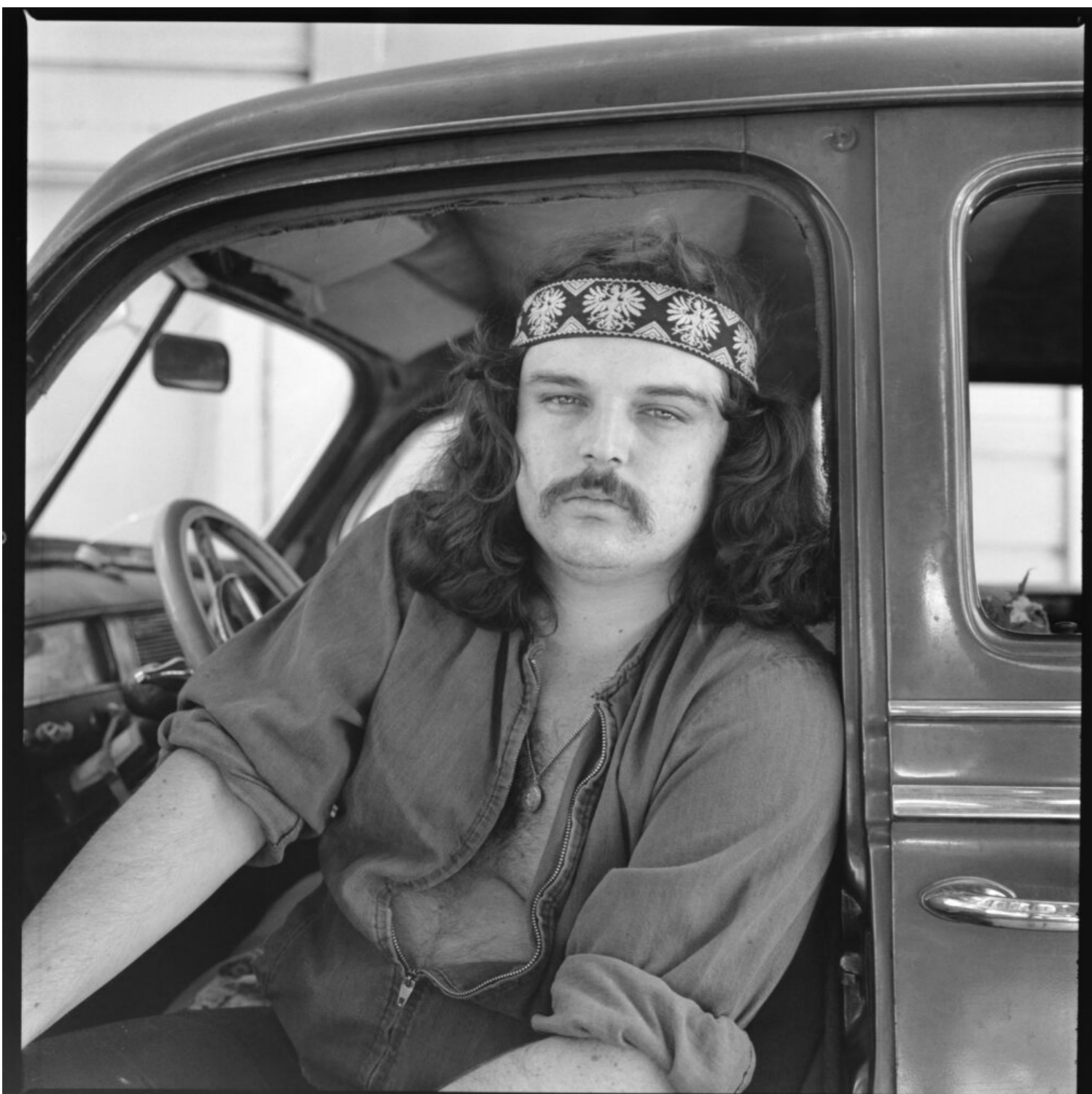
“Sammy Hagar — Golden Gate Bridge, Sausalito,” May 5, 1989.

Photo: Jay Blakesberg, Marin MOCA

San Francisco rock photographer Jay Blakesberg has 11 images in the show compared to Greene’s seven, but he is deferential to the pioneer.

“I still look at his work from the ’60s and draw immense inspiration from the beauty of his natural window light portraits of the Grateful Dead, Led Zeppelin, Rod Stewart and so many others,” Blakesberg says.

“Herbie is a legend, and I am always honored when we are connected on a project.”



“Ron ‘Pigpen’ McKernan at Olompali,” 1966.

Photo: Herbie Greene 1966

“**Marin’s Rock Art Scene**”: 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Wednesday-Friday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday-Sunday. Sept. 12-Nov. 8. \$10. Reservations and masks required. Marin Museum of Contemporary Art, 500 Palm Drive, Novato. marinmoca.org

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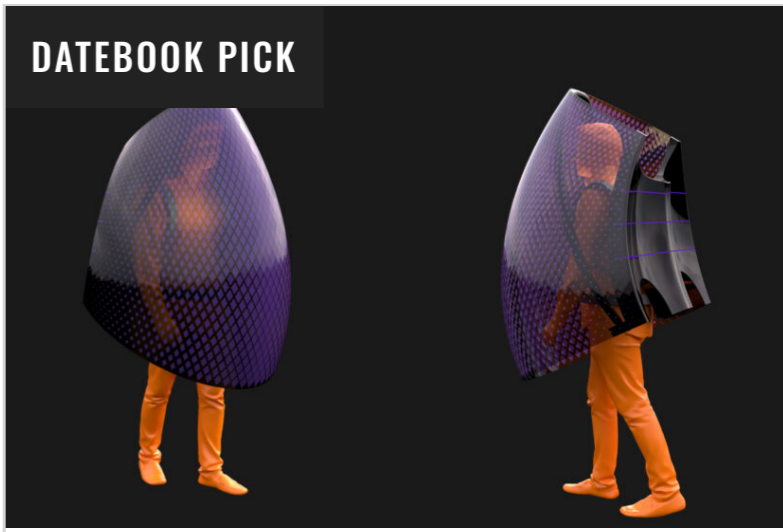
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