



Angels

with dirty faces

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HUGH HOLLAND AND INTERVIEW BY SAM HADDAD

Dogtown and Z-Boys lodged the skateboarders of Southern California, who in the drought-ridden mid-1970s made the empty swimming pools their own, into our consciousness. But it was Hugh Holland's soft low-light portraits that most beautifully captured the aesthetic of the time. We wondered how he felt about the shots over twenty years on, so we asked him

Was it difficult to penetrate the skate gangs to get your shots?

I'm not sure about the word "gangs"! They were loosely grouped friends, and I think I started out with the most friendly ones, maybe by luck, and then expanded to others. They were all very nice to me, and we got along well.

So the localism wasn't as bad as people have suggested?

Oh no, I can't remember any instances of trouble between groups from different areas. They were all going all over LA and southern California area all the time. It's amazing now, to think that then, without cell phones and email, word got around so fast about the different hot spots. I had a car and a camera,

so it seemed I was always welcome! Of course there was the occasional graffiti in bowls and pools saying "locals only", but I didn't notice much animosity. It was an exciting time, and they were pretty much just having fun.

Did they like to see the pictures of themselves?

Definitely, and seeing pictures of themselves was a primary bonding agent in our relationship. They were lining up to get their picture taken in action all the time, and I gave out tons of prints!

Was it unusual to shoot the actors rather than the action at that time?

It was unusual I guess, but I didn't think about it at the time. I just did what I do, which

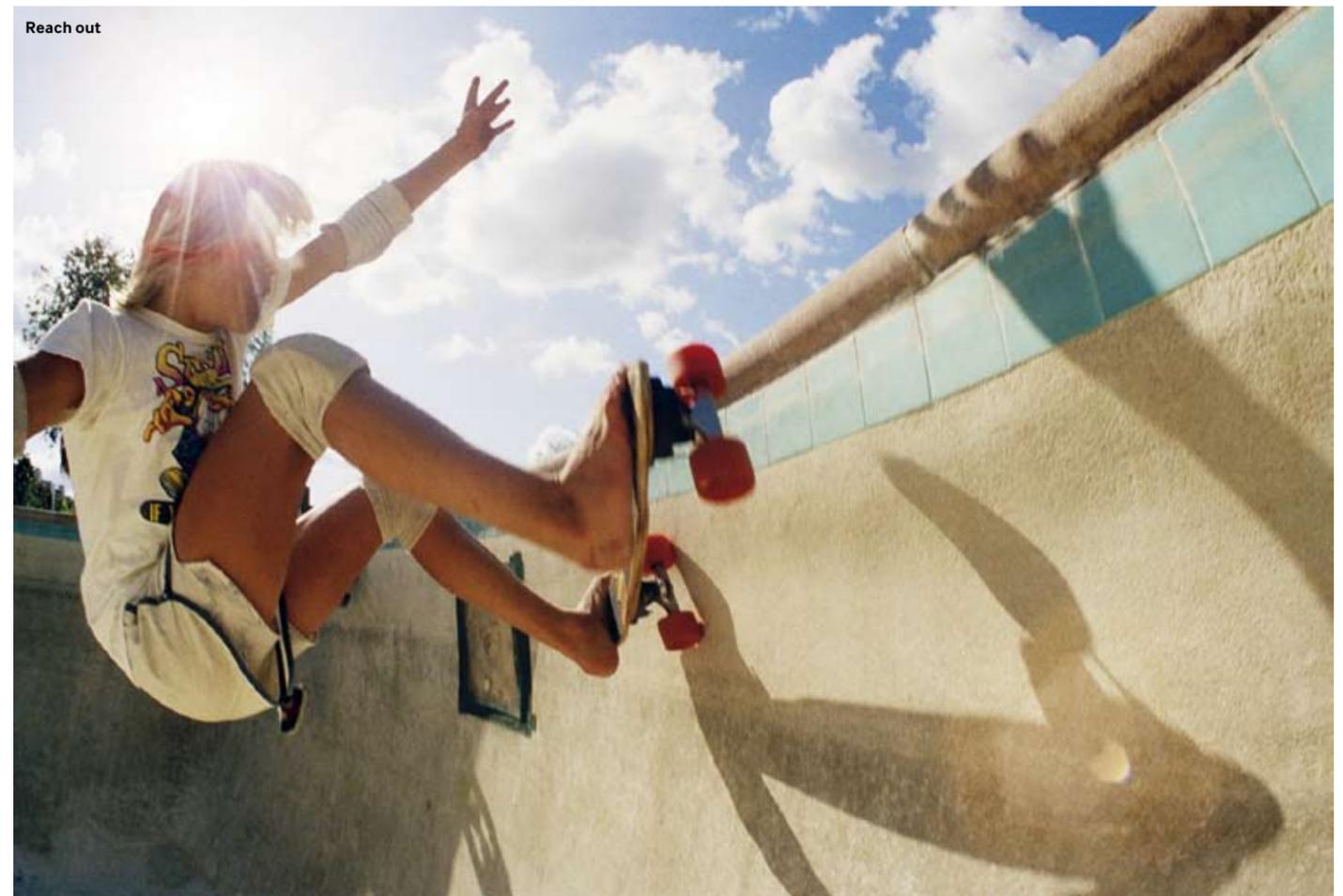
is capturing the visuals that catch my eye! None of the subjects seemed to think a thing about it. Years later, looking back on it, it does become evident that maybe my viewpoint was unique in a way. Other people were shooting sports-type photos, or kids were shooting snaps of each other, but nobody was doing quite what I did, which was to document the actors as you say, and the lifestyle of the times.

Why did you choose old colour negative movie film?

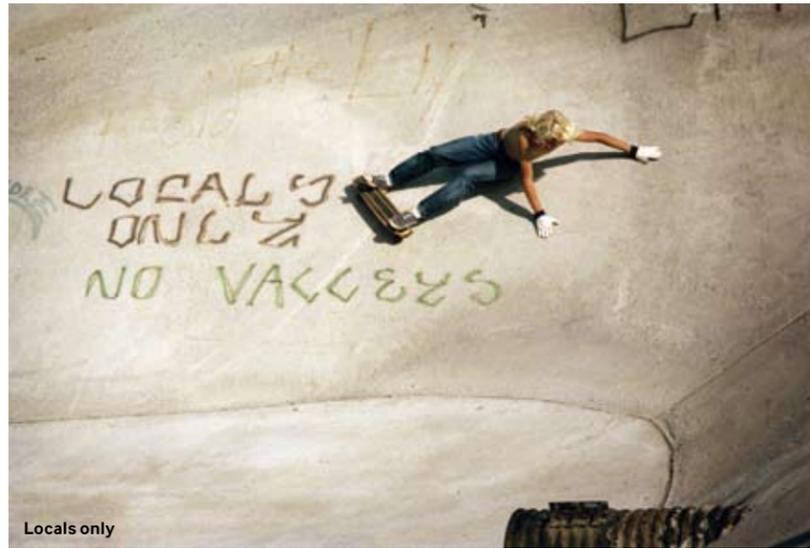
To tell the truth, my main reason for using that colour negative movie film was because it was cheap, and you could get negatives and positive film prints, which were in the form of slides thrown into the bargain. Also, I did



Sidewalk surfer



Reach out



Locals only



Riding to ride



Hanging in Balboa

come to love the look of the film. It was soft and warm, and had the feel of movie stills, and this was Hollywood, after all!

Are you still in touch with any of the skateboarders you shot back then?

There have been a couple that have resurfaced recently, since these pictures started to get attention, but no, I lost touch with them over the years. I'd like to reconnect with some of them though, that would be great.

Did you have any idea how significant these images would come to be?

No, I didn't. I knew they were significant to me, but otherwise I never dreamed they would become a whole art documentary of a time.

What kind of stuff do you shoot now?

After the skateboard years, I spent a lot of time in Mexico, and I did some series of images there that were narrative and maybe allegorical, figurative, mostly young male figures, and urban and small town scenes. Spanish colonial mystique mixed with indigenous culture fascinated me. Now I live in San Francisco, and I shoot all kinds of things, though I still like street photography the best.

All images © Hugh Holland and courtesy of M+B (mbfala.com). All photographs are available as fine art limited edition prints at mbfala.com and in early 2009 Hugh Holland will be releasing a book of his work titled Roadrunners, published by Greybull Press

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Solo