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# NEWS

L O S A N G E L E S

## Lo Porto Call

*Mr. Roger's Neighborhood* it ain't, but Marc Lo Porto's *Fantasy Land* is the place to hang if you want to meet some of the most colorful characters in SoCal. There are Bobby Brown, "The World's Greatest Wino," whose favorite activity is hanging out on the Venice boardwalk and scopin' the lovely ladies; Cherie, "The Cat's Meow," a flamboyant, bronze-skinned beauty who roller-skates by day and performs exotic dancing by night; Anthony Hale, the hookah-smoking cop who believes in the legalization of drugs; and Isaac Fields, the Korean War veteran known for peddling his tricycle by the seashore and whispering messages of peace through his microphone. These are just some of the unconventional personalities who populate Lo Porto's recent folio-sized photography book, documenting Venice Beach's cavalcade of nonconformity.

A tall, tanned native of France, Lo Porto, now 24, came to America to surf and study journalism at Santa Monica College. While living in Venice, Lo Porto had the idea to immortalize the denizens of his favorite community with this self-published collection of photos and interviews. "At first I just wanted to know more about people I saw every day and was impressed with," Lo Porto explains. "I thought this was a way to approach them and get to know what was behind their roles as performing artist, actor, or homeless person." As the project progressed, Lo Porto's success in getting the material he wanted from his subjects emboldened him to paint a complex picture of Venice Beach's climate of social tolerance. Three years later, *Fantasy Land* hit the shelves of independent bookstores. So far, it has sold almost half of its original run of 1,000 copies — an impressive number considering that Lo Porto did all of the marketing and distribution himself.

Beginning this Saturday, July 24, from 7 to 11 p.m., Lo Porto's *Fantasy Land* goes on view at the Venice art gallery known as the Sandbox. The show features original prints from Lo Porto's homage to Venice, with many of the book's eccentrics and iconoclasts on hand to discuss the issues raised by Lo Porto's funky, low-down opus. Think of Lo Porto's living dramatis personae as the '90s alt-culture versions of Norman Rockwell's salt-of-the-earth Americans, with a Cat in the Hat street poet or a dreadlocked philosopher taking the place of the standard barber or pediatrician, and you begin to get an idea of what to expect when the Sandbox turns into a flesh-and-blood slice of modern Americana.

With his short, peroxide-blond hair, skate-punk attire, and laid-back attitude,

Lo Porto looks like he should be out playing Frisbee rather than promoting a book. But as with the inhabitants of *Fantasy Land*, appearances can be deceiving; Lo Porto actually comes off as a determined young man. "At first, I tried approaching publishers with the idea, but I got a lot of negative answers," he says. "The people in the book are not really appealing to them. I think they were scared of the street dancers, the homeless people, and so on. So I was like, 'Okay, I'm done with that. I'm not going to waste my time.' If you don't know anybody, it's really impossible to get something published the way you want."

Though Lo Porto's foray into publishing has been a hit, his next adventure has nothing to do with the musty realm of pen and paper. "I'm planning to go around the world in a van starting next year," Lo Porto says. "I've been wanting to do that for a long time." The trek will start in Mexico and go south, but Lo Porto hasn't thought beyond that point. Will his travels result in another book?



A Venetian in *Fantasy Land*

"Maybe," he smiles. "But that's going to take a long time."

—Stephen Lemons

Photos from Marc Lo Porto's *Fantasy Land* will be on display starting July 24 at the Sandbox, 1327 & 1/2 Abbot Kinney Blvd., Venice, with an opening reception this Saturday from 7 to 11 p.m. For more information, call 310-399-4164.