

# CERRITOS COLLEGE ART GALLERY

## Media contacts

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FOR IMMEDIATE MEDIA RELEASE

October 11, 2024

## PETER CARR

### Artist for Survival

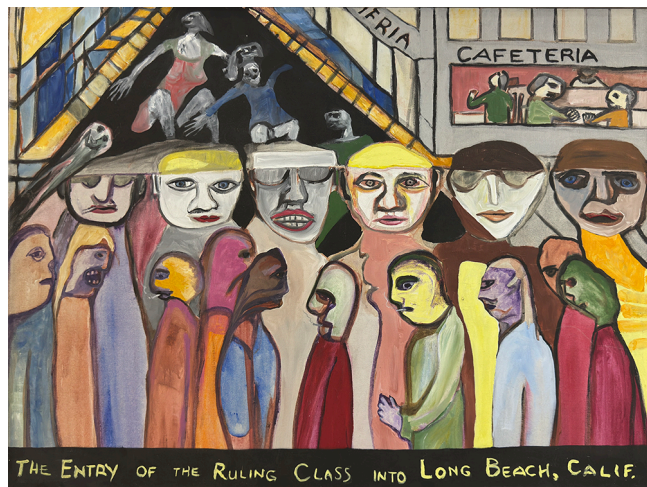
October 28 – December 13, 2024

Monday, October 28, 2024

Curator Talk @ 6-7pm  
with Opening Reception @ 7-9pm

Saturday, November 23, 2024

Live Poetry Readings @ 1-3pm  
with Visitor Reception @ 3-5pm



Cerritos College Art Gallery is proud to present *PETER CARR: Artist for Survival*, the first comprehensive art historical retrospective of the poet, activist, and fascinating outsider artist, Peter Carr (1925-1981), featuring a wide range of Carr's large-scale paintings, frenetic drawings, and homemade political posters, as well as his own personal notebooks, intimate sketches and studies, self-published books, and other biographically-significant ephemera.

Throughout his relatively short life (he died unexpectedly of a heart attack at just 56 years old), Harry Lawson "Peter" Carr created a seemingly endless array of idiosyncratic images, all constructed using his own distinctively evocative and expressionistic visual style. Carr would also frequently inscribe his drawings and paintings liberally with handwritten textual fragments, pulled from his own poetic compositions and meant to variously imply an internal monologue, overheard conversations, and/or omniscient narration. As a visual extension of both his acclaimed literary practice and his anti-authoritarian activist impulses, these images ruminate, often quite intensely, on the same explicitly political and existential dilemmas that consumed a majority of his waking focus. Not surprisingly, as a co-founder of the Orange County chapter of the Alliance for Survival and creator of its local spinoff, Artists for Survival, as well as the posthumous namesake for the Peter Carr Peace Center at Cal State Long Beach, Carr regularly deployed his inspired writing, challenging imagery, and satirical wit in the service of much bigger causes, hoping to engage like-minded creatives on the issues to which he so dedicated his personal life and professional career. A long-time resident of Laguna Beach as well, Carr's

visual and poetic compositions employed subtle gestures, both provocative and profound, to present his own acute social observations on the beauty and the absurdity of everyday life along the California coast in the 1970s, including his well-established personal antagonism to the encroachment of the nuclear and military-industrial complex into the region.

Carr served as a comparative literature professor at Cal State Long Beach for many years. Following his sudden death in 1981 (with the blessing of his widow and fellow community activist, Jeanie Bernstein), his massive personal archive of drawings, paintings, and notebooks passed to his fellow activist and student, Andrew Tonkovich, himself now a retired UC Irvine lecturer and longtime editor of the *Santa Monica Review*. For over forty years, these works have gone largely unknown and unseen, with this major retrospective being the first time that many of these pieces will ever have been exhibited publicly. In fact, the title of the exhibition, *PETER CARR: Artist for Survival*, while clearly derived from the name of the activist artist collective that Carr himself founded, primarily alludes to Carr's incessant and insatiable drive to create art as a strategy for personal and communal survival; but, it is also meant to serve as an acknowledgment of, and expression of gratitude for, the unlikely survival of this entire archive, almost exclusively through the dogged and dedicated persistence of Carr's acolyte and former student, and co-curator of this exhibition, Andrew Tonkovich.

To provide insight into Carr's singular perspective and uniquely creative vision, the exhibit as a whole is organized around a number of recurrent themes in his archive, with individual section titles taken directly from his signature poems, highlighting the alignment of this visual oeuvre with his more well-known literary output. The works in the section titled *The (Re)Discovery of California*, for example, address Carr's automythographic fascination with the place he called home, including his speculative understanding of life and culture in this region prior to the destructive settler colonialism of Manifest Destiny, as well as the ongoing resource exploitation he saw as endemic to modern corporate capitalism. Along similar lines, *They Were Going That Way*, includes works featuring melancholic individuals forever in transit, moving laterally through the unruly urban sprawl of Southern California or simply waiting indefinitely in non-places like the bus terminal. In *Humans and Other Creatures*, the works showcase Carr's ongoing aspiration for humanity to hold love, affinity, and communion with each other and the wide variety of living beings with which we share the natural world. The section *How Could It Be*, on the other hand, centers the inverse, Carr's profound ecological despair and the darker existential concerns that haunted him. The section, *I Want to Ask You Some Questions* brings together Carr's most provocative images, with explicit depictions of class inequality, corporate corruption, and the brutality of both state and racialized violence. Works in the section *Now That We Are Here We Have to Decide What to Do*, however, turn that social critique on its head, focusing specifically on the collective power of communities, both mythological and contemporary, with explicit calls for active engagement and political solidarity.

Harry Lawson "Peter" Carr (1925-1981) was born in Pasadena, served in the US Navy, earned a PhD in Comparative Mythology from USC, and studied in India on a Fulbright Fellowship. He co-founded the Department of Comparative Literature at CSULB, where he was a popular and innovative teacher, and co-founded the grassroots anti-nuclear organization, the Orange County Alliance for Survival. Carr was the author of many self-published books and pamphlets, including *Aliso Creek* and *In the Summer We Went to the Mountains*, and produced thousands of drawings, paintings, political posters, and illustrations throughout his life. His work was shown in galleries in Laguna Beach, Long Beach, Los Angeles, and the Pacific Northwest. He lived for many years in South Laguna with community activist Jeanie Bernstein and was active with the Laguna Poets. A small posthumous showing of his work was previously organized by the late Mark Chamberlain at BC Space in 2016. Both the Jean Bernstein and Peter Carr Papers are held at the libraries of the University of California, Irvine.

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## ABOUT THE CERRITOS COLLEGE ART GALLERY

Founded in 1955, Cerritos College is a public comprehensive community college in southeastern Los Angeles County. The mission of the Cerritos College Art Gallery is to serve as an educational, social and cultural enhancement for the Cerritos academic population as well as the immediate surrounding communities.

The Cerritos College Art Gallery presents rotating exhibitions, primarily featuring the work of emerging and mid-career artists. A special emphasis is placed on highlighting art that confronts the challenging and pressing issues relevant to contemporary art and culture. In support of exhibitions, the Cerritos College Art Gallery also regularly hosts workshops, lectures, and live performances.

Admission and events are free and open to the public.

Daily Parking is available for \$3.00 in Lot 10 in the student white stalls only (use the QR Code on the parking signs to purchase temporary parking passes).

### LOCATION/CONTACT

Cerritos College  
Fine Arts Building, Room 107  
11110 Alondra Blvd  
Norwalk, CA 90650

(562) 860-2451 x2612

<https://www.cerritos.edu/art-gallery/>

### SPRING 2024 HOURS

**Monday:** 11 am - 7 pm

**Tuesday:** 11 am - 7 pm

**Wednesday:** 11 am - 7 pm

**Thursday:** 11 am - 7 pm

**Friday:** 11 am - 4 pm

**Saturday:** Closed (*except for special events*)

**Sunday:** Closed