

NEWS RELEASE

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MEDIA EVENTS:

- Wednesday, April 24, 10:00–11:30 a.m.: Curator-Led Press Preview
- Thursday, April 25, 6:00–7:15 p.m.: Artist Walkthrough (followed by public opening party, 7:30–11:00 p.m.)

Reservations required: communications@skirball.org or (310) 440-4544

Skirball Cultural Center presents

GARY BASEMAN: THE DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN

April 25–August 18, 2013

First Baseman museum survey opens with “open house” party with the artist

LOS ANGELES—With *Gary Baseman: The Door Is Always Open*, the Skirball Cultural Center invites visitors into the fantastic world of artist, illustrator, animator, and toy designer Gary Baseman (b. 1960, Los Angeles). On view April 25–August 18, 2013, this first major museum survey of the artist’s life and work features paintings, photographs, toys, sketchbooks, and videos. These are presented in a novel gallery setting that evokes Baseman’s childhood home, replete with family snapshots and furnishings.

In a fun-loving style apropos of the artist, the Skirball caps opening day with “Gary Baseman’s House Party,” a public 18+ event, on Thursday, April 25, at 7:30 p.m. **Gary Baseman** will “play paintbrushes,” creating a spontaneous new artwork while indie rock band **Nightmare and the Cat** performs live. A DJ set by street artist and designer **Shepard Fairey**, as well as gallery tours and art-making activities, round out the evening. The opening-night program will be followed up by an array of Baseman-related talks, workshops, classes, performances, and family programs during the run of the exhibition.



The Door Is Always Open, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 18 inches

Organized thematically, *Gary Baseman: The Door Is Always Open* examines the many facets of Baseman’s creativity and underscores the influence of his Jewish upbringing and American popular culture on his career. The exhibition presents more than 300 artworks and objects from his prodigious output and eclectic collections. Highlights include vibrant illustrations for *The New Yorker* and *Rolling Stone*; title card paintings and maquettes for Baseman’s Emmy Award–winning animated television

series *Teacher's Pet*; iconic artwork for the popular board game Cranium; and many of Baseman's beloved, limited-edition designer toys. Also on display are examples of Baseman's richly symbolic, sometimes dark paintings and documentation of his celebratory performance art. In new videos recently produced by the Skirball for the exhibition, Gary Baseman introduces the main themes of each section. In a separate gallery that recalls Baseman's art studio, visitors can take a look at many of the artist's sketchbooks and create art of their own.

Giving visual expression to the exhibition title, the artist has created the new painting *The Door Is Always Open*. Baseman explains, "We are titling the show 'The Door Is Always Open,' something my father would always say to me to remind me I always had a home." The title also alludes to the "open door" the artist perceives between the realms of imagination and creativity and between fine and commercial art.

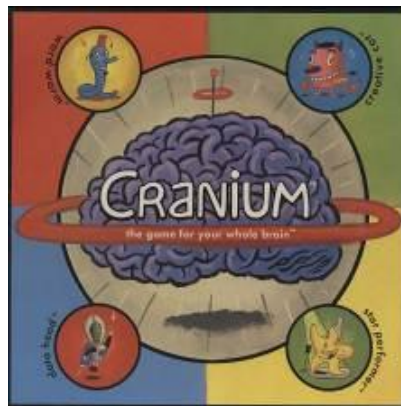
"We are thrilled to mount this first major exhibition on Gary Baseman, a true L.A. original," says Robert Kirschner, Skirball Museum Director. "At the Skirball, we have been especially inspired by Baseman's lifelong exploration of his Jewish heritage and the profound effect this has had on his exuberant, boundary-defying art."

The Door Is Always Open

*With each new medium I experimented with,
I knocked against new doors.*—Gary Baseman

In *Gary Baseman: The Door Is Always Open*, the artist welcomes visitors into his creative universe. Wall text and video introduce each section of the exhibition. Visitors are invited to inspect his family photos, sit on furniture from his childhood home in L.A.'s Fairfax district, and view his quirky collections and sketchbooks. By opening this door, the exhibition gives access not only to Baseman's work, but also to his history, influences, and artistic process.

Baseman uses the word "pervasive" to describe a hybrid practice that confounds easy categorization. "I see myself as an artist who likes to do everything—all the time," he says. As the exhibition demonstrates, Baseman does not limit himself to fine art, but extends his signature aesthetic—described by critic Steven Heller as "metaphoric candyland"—to illustration, animation, photography, video, toys, product design, fashion, and performance art. With its blur of highbrow and lowbrow, Baseman's work is found in galleries and magazines, TV and film, lecture halls and shops—just about anywhere.



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Gary Baseman at his Bar Mitzvah, 1973

In the exhibition, Baseman's life and "pervasive art" are intertwined. Each "room" features a different theme that expresses one facet of personal and communal life such as creativity, play, inspiration, and celebration.

- Visitors first encounter Baseman's **Studio**, featuring a sample of his works in progress and the artist's favorite music playing over speakers. The track list includes songs by Elvis Costello and The Velvet Underground, among others. Children and adults alike are encouraged to use the art supplies, sketchbooks, and drafting tables to make drawings of their own. Originals and facsimiles of some twenty Baseman sketchbooks serve to unleash the creativity in everyone.
- Featuring the well-worn armchairs of his aunt and uncle, who lived directly above the Baseman home, the **Living Room** welcomes visitors and recalls Baseman's youth. Visitors learn that as a latchkey kid, Baseman spent afternoons watching TV, reading comic books, and drawing in his parents' home on the first floor of a four-plex. On view are numerous family photos and artwork from many points in his career that provide insight into Baseman's world.
- The **Dining Room** focuses on feasts and holidays. Nostalgic photographs and super 8 footage of family celebrations, such as Seders and Baseman's Bar Mitzvah, are juxtaposed with artworks based on food or inspired by human hungers. The dining table and china cabinet belonging to his late parents—both Polish-born Holocaust survivors who immigrated to Los Angeles (by way of Canada) in the 1950s—help to set the scene.
- The **Hallway** is dedicated to the theme of journeys. Here visitors meet Toby, Baseman's sixteen-inch alter-ego and companion, well known to Baseman's tens of thousands of Facebook and Twitter followers. The joys of travel are celebrated as Toby poses for pictures, often at landmarks, and makes friends worldwide.
- In the **Study**, Baseman explores memory and heritage, sharing photographs from his parents' early years and his own recent trip to the Eastern European villages where they were born and where relatives were murdered by the Nazis. Here are some of Baseman's more sober works, including paintings memorializing his father and cousin Beverly; a selection of the *Seven Sacred Magis* figurines, representing virtues such as love, trust, and freedom; and the *Wolyner Forest Warrior*, named for the area where his father fought as a World War II partisan.



Sketchbook drawing, 2012 (Forest Sketch)



Toby at Canter's, 2012

- Work is the theme of the **Office**. On view are editorial commissions for publications such as *The New Yorker*, *Rolling Stone*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *LA Weekly*, as well as some of the artist's collections of commercial display items, including advertising mascots, mannequins, and dolls' heads.
- In the **Den**, Baseman shares designs for his popular children's cartoon series, *Teacher's Pet*, which aired on ABC/Disney from 2000 to 2002 and was made into a feature film in 2004. Visitors have a chance to view *Teacher's Pet* characters in sketches and paintings, modeled in clay, and in Baseman's favorite episodes playing on video monitors. Here, too, is Baseman's award-winning design for the board game Cranium, along with many of his miniature vinyl figurines. These highly collectible toys derive largely from the same cast of characters that populate Baseman's paintings, among them Dumb Luck, Fire Water Bunny, ChouChou, and HotChaChaCha.
- In the **Bedroom**, the focus is the unconscious world of dreams and nightmares. Set alongside Baseman's parents' bedroom furniture is the six-armed *Mystic Toby* and three whimsical outfits the artist co-designed with Israeli fashion duo Frau Blau. Baseman shares his dream life in paintings, such as *The Explosion of Dream Reality* and *The Mystic Order of the Cypress Park Beauty Salon*, and celebrates his longtime fascination with Halloween and monsters.
- The **Backyard** highlights Baseman's jubilant performance pieces such as *La Noche de la Fusión* (2009) and *Giggle and Pop!* (2010). Represented by masks, props, costumes, and new piñatas specially created for the exhibition, Baseman's elaborately orchestrated performances urge observers to tap into their own creativity. As the artist says, "Throughout all my performances, my aim is to encourage people to lose their inhibitions, be childlike again, and just play."



The Explosion of Dream Reality, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 4 x 3 ft.

Related Public Programs

In addition to "Gary Baseman's House Party" on opening night, the Skirball will present an array of related programs during the run of the exhibition, including an artist's talk by **Gary Baseman** on how family history informs his work. Baseman will also participate in a conversation about growing up in the Fairfax district; he will be joined two lifelong friends, TV writer **Seth Kurland** and composer **Barry Smolin**. Visitors may register for a bus tour of Gary Baseman's L.A., which will include a stop at the landmark Canter's Deli, where his mother served as head bakery salesperson for thirty-five years. For families, there will be a Baseman-themed museum sleepover and a family-friendly art workshop led by the artist himself. Baseman has also designed a gallery guide especially for family visits. A complete schedule of related programs is available [here](#).

Catalogue and Merchandise

Gary Baseman: The Door Is Always Open (Skira Rizzoli, 2013, 208 pp., hardcover, \$45) is a full-color, 200-page monograph. The artist himself, with Denise A. Gray, introduces each chapter while Baseman's work is considered in essays by Alice Hutchison, pop-archivist Jim Heimann, art director and graphic design specialist Steven Heller, and art historian Aaron Rosen.

In conjunction with *Gary Baseman: The Door Is Always Open*, Audrey's Museum Store features a wide selection of products designed to encourage the artist in all of us, including Baseman vinyl toys and art objects. An exclusive, limited-edition line of Baseman-at-the-Skirball merchandise will be available only at Audrey's, such as Baseman art supplies, an exclusive new Poketo wallet, temporary tattoos, jewelry, keychain charms, and more.

THE EXHIBITION AND ITS RELATED PROGRAMS AT THE SKIRBALL CULTURAL CENTER ARE MADE POSSIBLE IN PART BY GENEROUS SUPPORT FROM:

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About the Skirball

The Skirball Cultural Center is dedicated to exploring the connections between 4,000 years of Jewish heritage and the vitality of American democratic ideals. It welcomes and seeks to inspire people of every ethnic and cultural identity. Guided by our respective memories and experiences, together we aspire to build a society in which all of us can feel at home. The Skirball Cultural Center achieves its mission through educational programs that explore literary, visual, and performing arts from around the world; through the display and interpretation of its permanent collections and changing exhibitions; through an interactive family destination inspired by the Noah's Ark story; and through outreach to the community.

Visiting the Skirball

The Skirball Cultural Center is located at 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049. Free on-site parking is available; street parking is strictly prohibited. The Skirball is also accessible by Metro Rapid Bus 761. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday 12:00–5:00 p.m.; Saturday–Sunday 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; closed Mondays and holidays. Museum admission: \$10 General; \$7 Seniors, Full-Time Students, and Children over 12; \$5 Children 2–12. Exhibitions are always free to Skirball Members and Children under 2. Exhibitions are free to all visitors on Thursdays. For general information, the public may call (310) 440-4500 or visit www.skirball.org. The Skirball is also home to Zeidler's Café, which serves innovative California cuisine in an elegant setting, and Audrey's Museum Store, which sells books, contemporary art, music, jewelry, and more.

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