

NEWS RELEASE

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Skirball Cultural Center to present ROCK & ROLL BILLBOARDS OF THE SUNSET STRIP

Exhibition displays rare images of iconic billboards that dominated
the heart of L.A.'s music scene from the late 1960s to early 1980s

March 24–August 16, 2015

I saw in the rock & roll billboards of the Sunset Strip a vibrant art form, not something from another place and another time, set behind glass in a museum, but the pounding heart of my own generation's culture, defined bigger than life on the street, for all to see.—Robert Landau

LOS ANGELES, CA—From March 24 through August 16, the Skirball Cultural Center presents *Rock & Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, featuring works by Los Angeles–based photographer Robert Landau. On view will be more than twenty photographs from the only extensive collection of images that capture the hand-painted, temporary billboards that lined L.A.'s fabled Sunset Strip for almost two decades. Taken when Landau was just a teen, the photographs document the emergence of an expressive art form uniquely suited to the city of L.A. and bring to life a colorful and fleeting period in American popular culture. They trace the cultural phenomenon of rock billboard advertising from its inception in 1967—with the promotion of the Doors' debut album—to the advent of MTV in the 1980s. The photographs also offer a glimpse into L.A.'s past, portraying both the city's infrastructure and inhabitants at the time.

Exclusive to the Skirball's presentation of *Rock & Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, the installation will feature a site-specific mural painting, hand-painted over several days, by Enrique Vidal, a local artist and professional billboard painter active during the heyday of rock billboards. The mural will depict a detail of Jerry Garcia's guitar known as "Wolf," rendered at billboard scale to demonstrate the detail and mastery of these giant works. On April 21 at 8:00 p.m., Landau and Vidal will present a free illustrated talk at the Skirball, sharing their fascination with the rock billboard and discussing their respective artistic careers.

Presented as a companion to the Skirball exhibition *Bill Graham and the Rock & Roll Revolution*—the first comprehensive retrospective about renowned music industry impresario Bill Graham (1931–1991), opening on May 7—*Rock & Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip* adds a local dimension to the story of music promotion over the course of three decades. It will be displayed in the Skirball's community space known as the Ruby Gallery. Admission to the exhibition is free.

About *Rock & Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*

In 1967, head of Elektra Records Jac Holzman, took the bold step of renting out a billboard on West Hollywood's historic Sunset Strip to promote a little-known L.A. rock band called the Doors. For the next fifteen years, the Strip exploded with the vibrant new form of commercial art form. Once the Doors had paved the way, everyone from the Beatles and Bob Dylan to Frank Zappa and Led Zeppelin wanted to be

represented on the one-of-a-kind, hand-painted wooden megaliths that lined Sunset Boulevard. In those years, the Strip was the heart and soul of a vibrant music scene—home to legendary nightclubs, record companies, and record stores. From the 1960s to the 1980s, rock & roll billboards dominated the Strip, looming over the legendary mile-and-a-half stretch for just a month or two at a time before being dismantled, whitewashed, and repainted. Photographer Robert Landau, a teenager at the time, was there to document these ephemeral masterpieces, crafted by teams of rarely credited artists, designers, photographers, typographers, and installers.

About Robert Landau

Photographer Robert Landau was born and raised in Los Angeles. He was surrounded by fine art at his home and at the La Cienega Boulevard gallery owned by his father, Felix Landau, an Austrian immigrant who exhibited and promoted California artists. Robert Landau credits his first Nikkormat camera with transforming him at the age of sixteen from “an awkward bystander to a purposeful observer.” Throughout his career, Landau has compiled a vast archive of images depicting the unique characteristics of L.A.’s urban landscape and reflecting the city’s offbeat character. This exhibition is based on Landau’s fifth book, *Rock ‘n’ Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*; previous works include *Outrageous L.A.* (1984) and *Hollywood Poolside* (1997).

About *Bill Graham and the Rock & Roll Revolution*

Bill Graham and the Rock & Roll Revolution is the first major museum exhibition about the life and career of Bill Graham (1931–1991). Recognized as one of the most influential concert promoters in history, Graham launched the careers of countless rock & roll legends in the 1960s at his famed Fillmore Auditorium. He conceived of rock & roll as a powerful force for supporting humanitarian causes and was instrumental in the production of milestone benefit concerts such as Live Aid (1985) and Human Rights Now! (1988). As a promoter and manager, he worked with iconic artists including the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Santana, Fleetwood Mac, the Who, Led Zeppelin, the Doors, and the Rolling Stones. Organized by the Skirball, the exhibition opens May 7 and runs through October 11, 2015. Through memorabilia, photographs, archival concert footage, historical and new video interviews, ephemera, and psychedelic art, *Bill Graham and the Rock & Roll Revolution* is both a deeply personal reflection on Graham’s life and an exploration of how Graham helped transform rock music into the immersive, multi-dimensional, and highly lucrative phenomenon of rock theater that persists today.

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. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday 12:00–5:00 p.m.; Saturday–Sunday 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; closed Mondays and holidays. Admission to *Rock & Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip* is free every day. Admission to all other exhibitions: \$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 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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