



**For Immediate Release**

Images available upon request.



"This is the real point: that we are not really freaks at all - not in the literal sense - but the twisted realities of the world we are trying to live in have somehow combined to make us feel like freaks. We argue, we protest, we petition - but nothing changes... So now, with the rest of the nation erupting in a firestorm of bombings and public killings, a handful of 'freaks' are running a final, perhaps atavistic experiment with the idea of forcing change by voting ... and if that has to be called Freak Power, well ... whatever's right."

**Hunter S. Thompson**

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## **Santa Cruz MAH Announces Freak Power Exhibition**

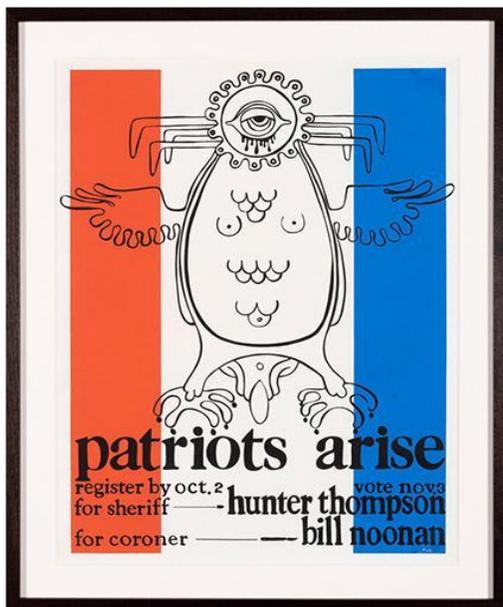
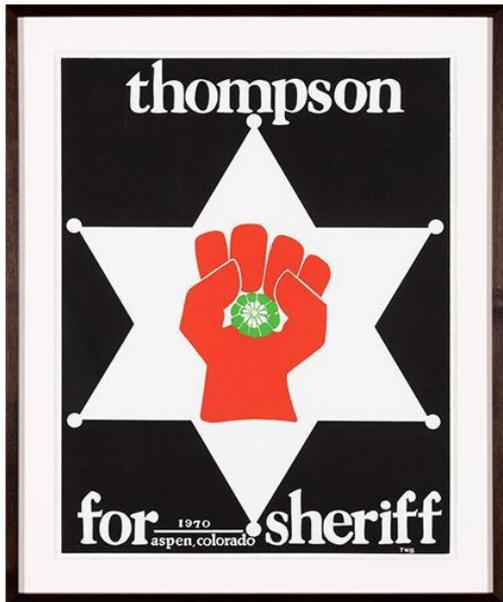
**The Art of Hunter S. Thompson's  
Political Movement**

**May 27–September 25, 2022**

**SANTA CRUZ, CA** (April 19, 2022 – The Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History (MAH) is pleased to announce **Freak Power**, an exhibition on the art of Hunter S. Thompson's political movement from **May 27, 2022 through September 25, 2022.**

In 1969 in Aspen, American journalist **Hunter S. Thompson** collaborated with a colorful cast of activists, intellectuals, and artists to launch a political movement which fought for the future of the town, the environment, and the nation. The Freak Power campaign used art, prose, and political theatre to generate a wave of support and to mobilize young people to vote and transform their local government. This traveling exhibition, titled for its namesake campaign, uses over 100 vintage screen-printed posters, photos, films, and texts to tell the story of the Battle of Aspen, which saw artists, beatniks, and other concerned citizens fighting against gentrification, oppression, war, and environmental destruction.

The energy of this movement can still be felt in the Freak Power collection, assembled by curators **Daniel J. Watkins** and **Yuri Zupancic**. Original art by **Ralph Steadman** and **Thomas W. Benton** combine with Thompson's writing and political theatre to shed new light on a chapter in history which also resonates today.



According to curator Daniel Joseph Watkins, "Hunter S. Thompson's Campaign for Sheriff took place shortly after his experiences living in the Central Coast and San Francisco. Thompson's time in California inspired his activism, solidified his sympathy for alternative lifestyles and led to a passion for environmental protections that were incorporated into his political platform. We are excited to bring this exhibition to the West Coast for the first time at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History."

### About the Artists

**Hunter S. Thompson** was born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1937. He showed a knack for writing at a young age, and after high school began his career in journalism while serving in the United States Air Force. Following his military service, Thompson traveled the world to cover a wide array of topics for numerous magazines and developed an immersive, highly personal style of reporting that would become known as "Gonzo journalism." He would employ the style in the 1971 book for which he is best known, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, which was an immediate and lasting success.

**Ralph Steadman**, an English artist and illustrator, became friends with Hunter S. Thompson in May 1970 and the two corresponded and collaborated regularly on such works as *The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Steadman vocally supported the Freak Power movement from abroad and mailed original drawings to Aspen to be used as campaign materials. Steadman has continued to make Freak Power work and recently created a number of new drawings that incorporate original Freak Power materials.

**Thomas W. Benton** met Hunter S. Thompson in Aspen during the late 1960s. Their friendship and collaboration spanned more than four decades and created or inspired some of Benton's most recognized works, including the 1970 "Hunter S. Thompson for Sheriff" poster and a series of political posters that combined art and writing called "The Aspen Wallposters." He went on to create campaign posters for more than fifty candidates including George McGovern, Gary Hart and Willie Brown. Benton also created numerous cause posters for local benefits, non-profits, and charitable causes that suited his beliefs.



## About the Curators

**Daniel Joseph Watkins** is a writer, producer, and director based in Aspen, Colorado. His first book, *Thomas W. Benton: Artist/Activist*, won the Colorado Book Award and his second book, *Freak Power: Hunter S. Thompson's Campaign for Sheriff*, served as the inspiration for the documentary film *Freak Power: The Ballot or the Bomb*. Watkins runs the publishing company Meat Possum Press and serves as director of the Fat City Gallery where he has curated over fifty shows and manages traveling museum exhibitions.

**Yuri Zupancic** is an independent curator and artist based in Paris. He's played curatorial and organizational roles in over 50 exhibitions at museums and galleries around the world, including ZKM, Pompidou Center, IMMA, and The Photographers Gallery. His areas of expertise range from the art of the Beat Generation to contemporary expanded media and post-digital art. As co-founders of PRYZ Agency, he and Pauline Rolland facilitate the archiving and exhibition of historic collections. In his personal art practice, Yuri creates and exhibits miniature oil paintings on microchips, video art, and other works. Eager to explore and share new perspectives, he collaborates regularly with diverse artists, collectors and institutions around the world.

## Media Contacts

**Robb Woulfe**  
Executive Director  
(831) 429-1964 x 7018  
[robb@santacruzmah.org](mailto:robb@santacruzmah.org)

**Nikki Patterson**  
Director of Development & Communications  
(831) 429-1964 x 7025  
[nikki@santacruzmah.org](mailto:nikki@santacruzmah.org)

## About the MAH

The MAH is a thriving community gathering place that serves more than 130,000 people annually through rotating art and history exhibitions, visual and performing artworks, public festivals, education and outreach programs, and cultural celebrations in collaboration with its many partners. It maintains a permanent collection of regionally significant art and artifacts, a research library, a historical archive, and historic sites including the Evergreen Cemetery, Octagon Building, and Davenport Jail. It is also home to Abbott Square, a vibrant public plaza on the museum's doorstep that offers food, social events, and year-round creative happenings. The *Freak Power* exhibition is presented by Aspen/Snowmass Express Travel Related Services Inc, with additional support provided by Michael Justice Buysse and Alex Buysse.

