

# Transforming broken boards into art

Artist Ithaka will showcase his work on Friday at Hurley headquarters in Costa Mesa.

The waves were double overhead, meaty and monstrous.

Darin Pappas started driving down the line of a beautiful right-hander to tuck into the bombing barrel at the Point in Newport Beach near 18th Street, when he took a gnarly wipe-out.

"It completely destroyed me and destroyed the board," he said on a recent day, remembering that fateful surf session in the mid-'80s.

He hobbled from the beach beaten, his board demolished and no longer able to ride.

The surfer had just picked up painting, and as he looked at the trashed board sitting in the corner of his apartment, he had an idea. He picked up his paintbrush and started to transform the surfboard - recycling it from something destined for the dump and turning it into a work of art.

It was just the start for the surfer turned artist - who now goes by the name Ithaka - a three-decade journey that would lead him to live near waves at exotic places around the world, scouring surf breaks for demolished boards to breathe new life into them. Now, the Anaheim native has returned home to Orange County to showcase his art at a show called Reincarnation



PAUL BERSEBACH, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

of a Surfboard on Friday at the Hurley headquarters in Costa Mesa.

"I think it's kind of like returning to my roots in a way," he said. "It's like a homecoming."

Like many surfers, it was love at first sight. The then 12-year-old was on a vacation in Hawaii with a friend when he first got a glimpse of surfers taking on Honolua Bay, where guys were getting barreled under 6-foot waves.

"I was like 'that's the life for me,'" he remembers thinking.

He immediately sold his drum set and bought his first surfboard, hitting the waves in Newport as much as possible.

As he reached adulthood, he moved to Hollywood, where he was breaking into the art scene as a photographer. Still, he found himself frequently making the long trek to Orange County to surf his favorite waves.

## About Ithaka

**Age:** 47  
**Favorite surf spot:** Honolua Bay  
**Hobbies:** riding bicycles, hiking  
**Favorite food when in O.C.:** Wahoo's  
**Price of sculptures:** \$3,000-\$7,000  
**About doing art for a living:** "Being an artist for anyone is an uphill battle. Poverty never tasted so sweet, when you're doing what you love to do."

## About the show:

**Time:** 6-9 p.m.  
**Date:** Friday  
**Address:** Hurley headquarters, 1945 Piacentia Ave., Costa Mesa.

After his first transformation of that broken board from his fateful Newport surf session, friends started bringing him their broken boards. He set up a booth at the Venice Art

Walk in 1990 to showcase his work.

But he started itching for inspiration elsewhere.

"I found myself in a place where I was not surfing enough. I just wanted to begin exploring the world a bit," he said.

He lived in Japan for a year, then bought a one-way ticket to Portugal, a country he describes as a "hybrid creature between urban and surf culture."

"I just made a promise to myself. No matter what the economic level, I was always going to have an interesting life," he said. "I just went for it. It led to so many things. It's such a sense of freedom because you're not basing your life on your neighborhood roles of who you think you are or how your friends think you are."

New friends he made along the way knew he was the man to hand off their broken boards to.

"I would have too many

Ithaka displays one of his surfboard creations, "Rainha Akswaya," at Hurley headquarters in Costa Mesa. The artist will have a one-night show called *The Reincarnation of a Surfboard on Friday* at Hurley.

ago he made a radical move about nine hours south of Rio to live out of a studio set in the middle of the jungle.

The nearest surf break is about 2 miles away and is similar to Huntington, but with "70 percent fewer people and 100 percent more jellyfish." His neighbors about a mile away are an indigenous tribe who live on the Guarani reservation. There's no Internet, not even an address.

Being away from civilization helps keep him focused.

"It's very therapeutic," he said. "I put it on autopilot. It takes concentration, but I'm letting it create itself."

His friends in the jungle are the sloths, birds and insects, many of which he draws inspiration from.

"It's a totally different experience," he said. "I'm obsessed with insects right now."

Then, there's the blue piece dotted with glistening acrylic jewels called "Amaris," which is the name of a star. He got the board from a friend's little brother, and it was so delaminated it was waterlogged and weighed about 20 pounds. That board was once a popular Al Merrick Fred Rubble model. Then, there's the surfboard that was transformed into a bass guitar, like his other sculptures unrecognizable as being something a surfer rode.

He said there's a connection between art and surfing.

"I think surfing in general is helpful creatively. It's always different," he said. "It's one of the only sporting activities you can do that is especially a different experience every time you do it."

boards at times, for sure," he said.

He had one criterion - they couldn't still be usable as a surfboard.

"I'd rather have some kid ride it," he said.

He likes boards from the '80s because they are light but thick, and he doesn't feel bad about cutting them up. But earlier models from the '70s basically have to be trashed for him to transform them into art.

"It's potentially a collector's item, anything before that period," he said. "I think about that really seriously."

He used to log the stories of how he obtained the boards and how the owners broke them, but after so many pieces it became too tough to keep track. To date, he's made about 300 reincarnated boards.

Five years ago, he moved to Brazil and bounces between there and Orange County. About three years