

THE EXPERIMENTAL IMPULSE
LA COUNTRY PUNK
1970s – 1980s

INTERVIEW WITH
MARC KREISEL

How and why did you conceive of Al's Bar?

To answer "how" we would have to go into brain physiology – much to difficult. "Why" I conceived Al's bar is much easier. The L.A. art world in the mid 70's was a very small place with little or no support structure and a very small audience. I believed if that was the case the artists themselves had to take a hand in their own support.

Although you conceived of the bar as a "Money Pump" to support your artistic endeavors, would you say that the art ended up "pumping" the bar and truly making it the landmark it became? I saw an exhibition of Joseph Beuys at the Guggenheim and there was a piece there called 'Honey Pump'. 'Honey Pump' would encircle a free university. A very good idea and a beautiful sculpture. However I knew nothing in LA was free. I thought maybe a business (as it turned out a bar) could circulate money into the community. It could provide jobs, support a gallery & even start an art collection. All these things we did. But Al's could have been any for profit business as long as the profits went back into the arts community. As it turned Al's went way beyond my wildest dreams and became a very well know place. Part of the reason I think was because L.A as a city didn't know it even had artists in it. Our first article in the then Herald Examiner was titled "Al's Bar Where the Artists Go". From then on whenever you looked up art in LA there was Al's Bar. Then, with the addition of the music, it got way out of control. I don't follow the music very closely even to this day. There was one time we had booked a punk band called Fear and I was afraid they would tear up the place. They came on stage to a packed house looked at the audience and said "This place is fucked, you people are fucked I was very upset. It turns out they were a very good band and the bar was still standing in the morning.

In the late 70s/early 80s there seems to have been a crossover between punk and country music – "cowpunk". Did this merge and mingling happen at Al's? If so what were some of the bands that stood out?

I can't talk about the music with any expertise, because I was focused on the visual art community. Fortunately I think because the art community could never support the bar we had to bring in the music. The rest is history.

What is the future? Is LA becoming too expensive for artists to have the luxury to be experimental and sustain a space like Al's? Will there be a shift to the outskirts of LA or even other cities? The future? I think the idea of Al's is still viable. Al's is about the uses of money. Any thing that makes money and puts it back in the community is Al's Bar. You will have to answer this question yourselves. You are the future. Any thing is possible.