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The Los Angeles Poverty Department

BEST CREATORS OF POLITICALLY ESSENTIAL ART SHOWS

BY **CATHERINE WAGLEY**

The Los Angeles Poverty Department, aka the "other" LAPD, has been making art on and around Skid Row for 30 years. Founded by artist John Malpede, the collective primarily consists of homeless or formerly homeless collaborators. Their work is often unflinchingly political, like when they developed a performance in response to the 2015 police shooting of Charly Keunang, who went by "Africa" and was mentally ill. The group celebrated its anniversary with a dense and excellent exhibition at the Armory in Pasadena called "Do you want the cosmetic version or the real deal?," which ran from January to mid-May. It overflowed with videos and installations and could easily eat up hours. One video featured a tour of Skid Row led by three residents. They pointed out the self-segregation among the homeless, outed employers who took advantage of the disenfranchised and made jokes, such as the one about the crazy guy who tried to kill Reagan. As part of the exhibition, the LAPD did a performance called *What fuels development?* In it, Skid Row residents fought against downtown developers who were forcing them out in favor of an "alcohol-fueled entertainment" economy. This, of course, was not at all fiction.

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