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Skid Row, December 1, 2012

Dear LAPD interested folk,

Here's our year end round up of Los Angeles Poverty Department activities large and small, covered by LAPD staff members: Henriëtte Brouwers, Kevin Michael Key, Sohrab Mohebi and myself, John Malpede.

The year's 2 most important activities each engaged large numbers of Skid Row residents. Our ***Walk the Talk*** project was an epic peoples' history of Skid Row realized in the form of 3 days parades with a brass band. Our 2nd and 3rd ***Festivals for All Skid Row Artists*** provided a stage for over 150 performances of all kinds by neighborhood residents. Both projects reveal the longstanding and current vitality of the neighborhood, as does the new project in rehearsal right now, ***Biggest Recovery Community Anywhere***, which celebrates the regenerative capacity of Skid Row.

Focusing on Skid Row also involved introducing the neighborhood to people from other places, university students from far away corners of LA and artists and communities outside the US. This year we completed a collaboration with the Dutch group PeerGroupP, and initiated a collaborative project with the actors collective Wunderbaum, who are also from The Netherlands.

And lots more. Read on – and if you can, make a donation via paypal on our website, www.lapovertydept.org, or in the mail.

Thank You,
John Malpede



Walk the Talk Skid Row Performance Parade



May 26, 27, 28, 2012 was a Memorial Day weekend to remember as LAPD celebrated the history of Skid Row, with 3 days of parades, performances and a New Orleans style Marching Band. LAPD's Walk The Talk traveled the neighborhood to recreate significant events at the spots where they happened

and to perform the stories and honor folks and organizations that make this patch of land a viable, livable **community**. This was **our party**, about **our history, written by our LAPD, in our words by and for our folks. It was an epic peoples history of Skid Row.** I'm a 12-year "denizen" of Skid Row (how I hate that word). I was finally able to prance and dance down *my streets with a police escort*, proudly and loudly. I'm a former street hustler, a former criminal defense attorney, a recovering addict. I never thought I would ever utter these words: "The police were cool, really cool." These members of the other, LAPD joined in, had fun, put on our LAPD "**Menacing Cool**" sunglasses and mugged for the cameras, right alongside us. WOW! Like I said, you had to see it and feel it to believe it. So, just like a Mike Tyson championship fight, the blow by blow narrative can't do justice to what these eyes got to see on Memorial Day. **Please go to lapovertydept.org website, hit the *Walk the Talk* link for more info about each days events - Parade Routes - Biographies.**

On Saturday May 26th we began at 6th and Stanford, in front of the United Coalition East Prevention Project (UCEPP), where we had been rehearsing the 10-minute vignettes about each of our 36 community visionaries for more than 1 year. The Paradigm Brass Band revved up the music and we all boogied down to the next block where we celebrated **Mike Neely and the Homeless Outreach Project (HOP)**. The video on our website captures the spirit of these opening moments, especially when you see the pep in 78 year old Mr. Jesse Lee Murray's step. Mike's HOP program was the 1st to hire homeless men to create solutions for their own problems, and he went from being homeless in Skid Row to leading an organization with a multi-million dollar budget and over 50 employees. Mike, who currently serves as a Commissioner with The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), was overwhelmed and admitted that he was struck with a rare moment of speechlessness after he witnessed 'his' scene. We then danced and marched across the street to **Para Los Niño's (PLN)**, where we told the story of PLN's founder **Tanya Tull** and her struggle to provide child care services for the families living in Skid Row. Then we headed northwest across 6th street to my favorite Skid Row venue, "**The Hippy Kitchen**," where the Catholic Workers' **Jeff Dietrich and Catherine Morris** have been in service to this community longer than anybody I know. They gave LAPD Founder John Malpede his foothold in this neighborhood by letting him work there as a volunteer. Whenever there's a fight brewing for the rights' of Skid Row residents, Jeff (an anti-war activist) is sure to be in the thick of it. At the corner of 6th and Gladys, we re-enacted the well known tale of Jeff's lying down under the tires of a

dump truck hired by the Business Improvement District (BID) head honcho, to haul off the belongings of the street dwellers who were eating at the kitchen. As the story goes, after Catherine, who is Jeff's wife, convinced the BID supervisor that, "the trash," actually was people's cherished personal property, Jeff was almost crushed by the departing trucks because the drivers didn't see him jump under their tires in protest.

Ironically, it was Jeff and Catherine who led us to include, **Officer Rich** as one of our Skid Row heroes. Back in 2007, while doing our *Utopia/Dystopia* project, a number of folks were chosen by other nominees to be included in this project for their contributions. Jeff and Catherine chose "Officer Rich," a now retired LA County cop who worked at the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) office on 4th Street for 40 years. The 4th Street office handled the cases of Skid Row residents and often the DPSS case workers were not inclined to be respectful toward welfare recipients. Rich found out that the best way to maintain order was by giving people respect. "Officer Rich," showed ordinary people unforgettable small acts of kindness while working in a position of power. Big and Black, armed and physically intimidating, Rich was more social worker than baton wielding cop. Rich showed up all 3 days for our parade and everywhere we went, we heard over and over again, "That's Office Rich! Rich do you remember me? You got me my check; you saved me from jail...." The people of Skid Row were finally able to shower love and affection on this gentle giant of a man, it was a beautiful thing to see.

These 3 days were the culmination of the *Walk the Talk* project that is part of our ongoing rewrite of the mass media narrative about the Skid Row community. The creation of this performance and parade was a multi-layered, long running body of work. We have soooo many people to thank; first we thank the innumerable friends and residents who participated in *Utopia/Dystopia* and *220 Glimpses of Utopia* for these are the people who named names and led us to our honorees. Next we give proper respect to our 36 activists, artists and community visionaries who's hopes and dreams for Skid Row gave us both spiritual inspiration and countless concrete examples of the people, the problem(s) and the community. Many of these folks were retired or had moved on, they took time to come back and talk with us because they still care. With their words we created the 36 texts for the 10 minutes scenes that we performed about each person. Their spirit, acumen and initiatives will never be forgotten. Finally we must thank the individuals, agencies and departments that helped us make these 3 days happen. Our community partners and hosts for the *Walk the Talk talk* events leading up to the performance: United Coalition East Prevention Project, Central City Community Church of the Nazarene, SRO Housing, Inc., LA Inner City Arts, VOA Rotary House and The Last Bookstore. And of course the Paradigm Brass band and LAPD Central Division Captain Horace Frank and Sgt. Kaycee Chavez, LAPD Special Events Division Officer Dixon, and all the Bureau of Street Services (BOSS) and Department of Transportation (DOT) personnel, you all may have came as skeptics but you remained on your jobs long enough to become amazed. You were great! This project has been both history lesson and labor of love for me, I have learned so much. Mainly I have learned how proud I am of my community lineage; in the end right beats might. The Struggle continues.

--- by KevinMichael Key

LAPD at Dorothy Chandler Pavilion



Geographically Skid Row and The Dorothy Chandler Pavilion are quite near, metaphorically they represent different universes. On Tuesday October 16, members of the Los Angeles Poverty Department left Skid Row and went up to Bunker Hill to eat, celebrate and perform at the John Wesley Community Health Centers' **Hand and Heart Gala Fundraiser**. Since its inception in 1962, JWCH has been providing medical services to LA County residents; they are the primary health care facility for the Skid Row community.

Dr. Dennis Bleakley, aka "**The Skid Row Doc**," was a guest of honor at the event. Doc Bleakley was also among the 36 community assets given special recognition by LAPD during our recent **Walk the Talk** performances.



His bedside manner acknowledges the harsh realities of his patients' lives. He dispenses his medical wisdom just like we need it, straight with no chaser. LAPD was invited by Dr. Bleakley to recreate our "*tribute*" to him precisely because our portrayal was fact based and raw. He wanted us to show this well-heeled audience of dignitaries and donors what it's like to practice medicine on the frontlines. We were able to portray his passion and frustration in a humorous yet compelling manner that was extremely well received by the surprised audience. More important was the devilish smile he greeted me with at my next medical appointment, it meant we had properly represented Skid Row, and him, to those people up on the hill.

--- by KevinMichael Key

Festival for All Skid Row Artists

Because a tree fell into Gladys Park during the December storm last year we had to postpone our 2nd annual **Festival for All Skid Row Artists** to January 27 & 28 of this year. We decided to expand the festival to two days because there were so many Skid Row artists who wanted to show their work during the first festival. Not only did the festival showcase



Skid Row's brightest stars, the open mike part of the program was used by newbie's to step up with their first time performances. And Festival #2 included some artists from other parts of LA, such as Robert Gupta's Street Symphony and Raspin Stewart, to encourage artistic exchange and to bring folks from all over to see and appreciate Skid Row's artists at work.

And then, we had our 3rd Festival in October...

Rain was forecast for Saturday Oct. 20 and the 21st, so we quickly went about our preparations for **Los Angeles Poverty Department's 3rd Annual Festival for All Skid Row Artists**. X-man, Walt, Sean and X-Ray were already there and soon they had the sound system and stage in good shape. We weren't going to let anything dampen our enthusiasm. Gary, the Gladys Park worker who has seen everything, came in a little early so that we could get started right on time. As the park decorations and creativity stations began taking shape, anticipation was building. Some of the residents wanted to volunteer but we had it covered. They were talking about how much fun they had at our last event. It was a good feeling, watching everybody chipping in to make for another "**LAPD**" kind of happening in our community. The Festivals really filled the park and the community with a contagious spirit of cooperation.



Our Skid Row artists really showed up and showed out. They have come to recognize the importance of having this festival in Skid Row, not only as a way for them to display their talents, but also as a means to find inspiration and to get to know new people or deepen their relationships. Again this year the Skid Row Playaz formed our amazing 'house band' supporting many artists on stage.



Crushow "the Last Dragon" and G-NUT improvised an amazing rap that got everybody on their feet during the open mike section. Jeffery Jackson literally walked his whole drum set to the park and had us all dancing and stamping the ground with him. OG-man exhibited the whole series of paintings he made for the 'Peace in the Hood' coloring book. Yarn Bombing Los Angeles brought their 'Wishing Tree' and 'Urban Letters' project, where people could spell out short phrases with knit letters on the fence. Many people used the creativity stations to make art right on the spot and there were many children who had a great time doing that too! Twin Skid Row - who performed another amazing text by the way! - brought his son Ali to the stage and was happy being a father and watch his son paint. We saw Black Onyx have an impromptu audition right there in the park. Artists and friends recorded their performances and Skid Row Photography Club members, TeleMundo and students from Biola University and USC came to report about the festival. This year, with the help of Alex Market, we were able to give lunch bags and T shirts to all the performers. Linda and Celestine signed up 65 new artists for our Skid Row Artist registry, which now counts more than 450 artists living in Skid Row. We filmed and photographed all artworks and performances and will make a DVD with highlights. And Jennifer and Sohrab interviewed most artists for the Festival Newspaper.



Skid Row's artists and talents carried the ball and UCEPP - LAMP's Fine Arts Program - SRO Housing - Orchestrada Audio - AMITY Foundation - The Weingart - Alex Market - OG'n Service - DLANC - the Office of José Huizar - Central City Community Church of The Nazarene - Esther Taylor and artists from outside Skid Row, like 'Paul McCarthy and the Wicked Saints' and Mark Philips, found ways to contribute to make this Festival unforgettable. The Festival even attracted



some people from other parts of Downtown who were happy to have discovered the talents of Skid Row. The home team hit a home run. And, oh yeah, it never rained that whole weekend...

--- by KevinMichael Key and Henriëtte Brouwers

Cold War / Brain Freeze



LAPD's Kevin Michael Key, Henriëtte Brouwers and John Malpede spent mid-July through the end of August in The Netherlands completing our collaborative project on the Cold War with Dutch artists, Floris van Delft, Merel van Dijk and Henry Alles of the PeerGrouP. The resulting production ran for a week in the Noorderzon Festival in Groningen, the largest city in the north of the Netherlands. The two groups worked intermittently

over a 2 year period, with multiple week to month long meetings on both sides of the Atlantic, including a 10 day research mission in Berlin in October 2011. The PeerGrouP, like LAPD is accustomed to getting out and collecting primary research through interactions with people who've lived what they're talking about. While in Berlin we engaged with numerous individuals and ran the gamut from interviewing journalists to schmoozing with newsvendors. We hosted a dinner for a number of people that we met, which revealed much about the to this day emotionally charged legacy of the division of Germany during the Cold War. In February 2012, we presented an in progress performance at LA's Wende Museum. In keeping with the adventurous nature of the museum we presented the performance in the Museum archives and used archival materials in the performance, including flags, portraits of Erik Honnecker, busts of Stalin, and much more. The Wende Museum has the most extensive collection of East German artifacts outside of Germany. All Angelinos should check it out.



Utilizing the aisles in the Wende warehouse we were able to explore separating the audience into two groups having different experiences. We pursued this idea as we developed the finished performance during the summer. In addition, we decided to focus the performance on dissident artists within the GDR (east Germany). There were a considerable group of artists who were committed to the egalitarianism promised by communism and these artists worked within the GDR to try to attain reform the system and

achieve “socialism with a human face”. Their efforts were continuously undermined by the government, some were silenced, all were estranged. Their opposition played a significant role in eroding the authority of the East German government, sparking mass protests and hastening its downfall --- they risked more and achieved much more than an American named Reagan who sought much of the credit. These dissident artists, including Heiner Müller, Christa Wolf and Wolf Biermann, to name a few, were further frustrated when the GDR fell. The Federal Republic of Germany (west Germany) had no interest in creating a unified Germany that included their ideas.



As artists who are working within communities and who hope to bring about change that humanizes our society, we thought it an interesting imaginative reach to engage as deeply as possible with the reality of these east German artists who were on the losing end of history, but who’s honesty and depth of purpose is incontestable. Especially, since there’s no guarantee that our work will not be brushed aside in the name of entrepreneurial development. As it turned out we discovered that the writer Christa Wolf had spent 9 months in Los Angeles as a Getty Research Institute fellow in 1992, and she used this time to reflect on the paradise she had failed to create while in the ostensible paradise of Santa Monica. Her

reflections led her to surprising comparisons: the colonizing of California by the Spanish and the colonizing of the former east Germany by the affluent west Germans and the degradation of dissident artists in east Germany as it compares with the humiliation of homeless people begging on Santa Monica’s 3rd St Promenade (an activity now impossible, due to sophisticated laws criminalizing homelessness).

Our performance *Koude Oorlog / Brain Freeze* explored the lives and dashed hopes of Wolf and Biermann, the artistic repression in east Germany, and the continuing role of artists in seeking human rights and social equity. We would never have been able to dig so deeply into such a vast topic or to focus it so precisely, with out the support of the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs Cultural Exchange International program, which is a partnership with The Netherlands government’s SICA (Dutch Center for International activities). --- by John Malpede



Biggest Recovery Community Anywhere

Part of LAPD's mission has always been to change the dominant media narrative of Skid Row as a place where everyone *ends up* to where people *start over*. Our new project ***Biggest Recovery Community Anywhere*** highlights the neighborhood as one of the most significant recovery centers in the country with the longest history of recovery culture in Los Angeles. Culminating in a performance piece in May 2013, the project involves a series of events, screenings and discussions, acknowledging the culture and history of recovery in the neighborhood. The project underlines the importance of the neighborhood's recovery resources as the frontline of battling addiction in all of its various forms and faces. LAPD holds trice weekly open rehearsals at UCEPP where members of the group together work on the upcoming performance in May.



In preparation for this project, together with graduate students at OTIS MFA in Public Practice, LAPD has organized a series of screenings at various venues in the neighborhood looking at representations of recovery in film. Further, LAPD has contributed to the Last Bookstores *Indie Shelf Initiative* with a collection of books on recovery from the residents and former residents of Skid Row. As part of the same series, LAPD organized a reading by Mike Dolphin, where the world-renowned recovery advocate read passages from his most recent publication *Bridge to Shore*. The reading was followed by a moving performance by Skid Row's soul and gospel act The Black Onyx, which brought together bookworms, strollers, and recovery enthusiasts.

"In Skid Row you see recovering folk everywhere being productive, living regular lives, working in hotels - managing hotels, as addiction counselors, case managers, medical workers. There are meetings going on here all the time everyday, AA, CA, NA. There's a meeting going on right now - guaranteed!

I began interacting with people everyday, listening closely in meetings, and more importantly, watching them living the recovery process. I began drawing strength from these people who are fighting my demons - and guess what? They are winning the fight. They taught me the difference between treatment and recovery. Treatment takes place in funded facilities, but real recovery happens on these streets." KevinMichael Key, in LAPD's ***UTOPIA/dystopia***

by Sohrab Mohebbi

LAPD extracurricular!

This year LAPD participated in symposiums, conferences, workshops and presented and discussed the work of the organization at various venues in Los Angeles and beyond.

In January 14th, we participated in the **Empowerment Congress Summit** organized by the office of Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas at University of Southern California. John Malpede participated in a panel discussion on *The Empowerment of Art*. LAPD conducted a small workshop at the conference where members sang and performed excerpts from ***Walk the Talk*** about the history of Skid Row and invited participants to tell stories from their neighborhoods over beats of the drums of Walter and Henriëtte.



LAPD's 9 hour long video from our project ***State of Incarceration*** was on display at **Occidental College** in the Spring 2012. The video shows 184 Californians reading the entire 184-page decision of 9th. Circuit Court, ruling that the health services and over-crowded conditions in California's State prisons are in violation of the US constitution and constitute "Cruel and Unusual Punishment."



In June 2009, Malpede presented in '**TedEx Skid Row**,' an event that included speakers from the world of arts and activism, advocates for homelessness, mental health, Veterans care, and incarceration within the community of downtown Los Angeles, the Arts District and Skid Row. '**TedEx Skid Row**' was organized by LA Philharmonic violinist Robert Gupta who performed at the 2nd Festival for All Skid Row Artists with his 'Street Symphony'.



John Malpede, founding director of LAPD, presented on the work of the organization at the annual **Creative Time** Summit in New York. The Summit brought together over forty participants from around the globe under the umbrella of *Confronting Inequity*, presenting on October 12-13 at NYU's Skirball Center for the Performing Arts.

For the fall 2012 semester, LAPD lead the Studio Production seminar at **OTIS Graduate Public Practice program**. As part of and leading to LAPD's ***Biggest Recovery Community Anywhere***, together with graduate students, LAPD organized a series of screenings on representation of recovery in movies at UCEPP, James Wood Community Center and Weingart Center.



The group also participated in the Last Bookstore's *Indie Shelf Initiative*, curating a shelf that featured publications on recovery written by residents of Skid Row. Our Last Bookstore participation also included a video of LAPD produced talk: *Creating a Recovery Community on Skid Row*, featuring Darlene Berry, the first female hotel manager for SRO Housing Corporation, following manager of the two SRO parks and producer of the yearly San Julian Park, Recovery on the Frontline

Cocaine Anonymous Marathon. Redd Moore, drug treatment councilor for Behavioral Health Systems, and Orlando Ward, Volunteers of America and former Midnight Mission executive staff member. All three panelists have lived in the Skid Row community. Together with OTIS graduate students, LAPD is curating an exhibition/event that will celebrate the arrival of recovery in Los Angeles in March 1940 and will include an installation of selected documents from Dr. Bob's (co-founder of 12 step fellowship) archives.



LAPD has also conducted workshops and lectures at Occidental College, CalState LA Service Learning class, Scripps College and University of New Brunswick. LAPD board member Catherine Gudis (associate professor of history at University of California, Riverside) also contributed to Haynes Foundation Lecture - *Curating the*

City: Art, History, and Memory on L.A.'s Skid Row where she discussed history of Skid Row and LAPD's ***Walk the Talk*** (2012) project.

by Sohrab Mohebbi an Henriëtte Brouwers

Upcoming Projects:

HOSPITAL Collaboration

LAPD has been awarded a National Touring Program Grant to develop and tour the US with a new project **HOSPITAL**. **Hospital** will be made in collaboration with Dutch Theater Group WUNDERBAUM. Wunderbaum is a very cool group of 5 actors who work collaboratively, devising, performing and co-directing original works. They are smart, funny, dedicated, willing to be outrageous and are absolutely a pleasure to work with. They make the creative process exhilarating and fun. They don't hold back and they are open to an exchange of ideas.

The project is a cross-cultural examination of health care and healthcare systems. Research for the project will begin this winter, with LAPD'ers gathering stories here in conversations with LA clinic and hospital patients and doctors and administrators. Wunderbaum and LAPD will convene in May, August and September to create the performance, which will premiere in October 2013 and then tour.

When Wunderbaum was in residence at REDCAT theater in 2010, they invited LAPD's John Malpede to collaborate in making their show **Looking For Paul** which has gone on to play in The Netherlands and Belgium. While in town Wunderbaum saw LAPD working on **State of Incarceration** and we began to think of a further collaboration. We're all very excited about the work we will make together.

State of Incarceration at center of Queens Museum Retrospective Show on LAPD

The work of LAPD will be the subject of a large retrospective gallery show, one of the first in the renovated and expanded Queens Museum, when it opens a year from now. The Queens Museum in Flushing Meadow, Queens, New York has gained a reputation for curating exhibitions that directly relate to contemporary urban life.

LAPD's **State of Incarceration** will be the centerpiece of the retrospective exhibition. **State of Incarceration's** 60 prison bunk-beds will be installed in 1200 feet of gallery space along with video excerpts for the 4 month duration of the exhibition.

The successful United States Artists online fundraising campaign, that many of you contributed to, will help us to bring LAPD's large **State of Incarceration** cast to NYC for a week of performances and residency activities, which will include public conversations and workshops on reforming the criminal justice system.

Los Angeles Poverty Department projects are made possible with the support of:

