



2009

Welcome!

Here comes the LA Poverty Department Newsletter. LAPD is made up of people who make art and live on Skid Row, Los Angeles. A little known fact is that LA's Skid Row community is an incubator for visionary artistic and social initiatives that are finding solutions to profound societal problems. Creative efforts of all stripes are arising from the community at large. LAPD is happy to contribute to the neighborhood's creative vitality with performance, installation, movement, public art and public conversation events. Here's a short report on what we've been up to, in LA and beyond, and a glimpse of projects in the works.

During the past year, LAPD has worked with some of the most forward looking non-profits addressing homelessness and grass roots community development including: LAMP Community, OPCC, LA Community Action Network, and United Coalition East Prevention Project, Church of the Nazarene, Skid Row Advocates, all in Los Angeles County.

We've also worked with committed arts organizations including 18th St Arts Center; HIGHWAYS Performance Space and The Box Gallery. Recent LAPD projects have focused on: recovery from addiction and drug policy reform, countering the criminalization of homelessness, and on the flowering of the recovery community that is Skid Row. We convened residents and Skid Row based organizations and with the Urban Institute authored a paper "Making the Case for Skid Row Culture", that will soon be published by Americans for the Arts. In addition we created a 2 month residency in Bolivia, for the Spanish language premier of our Agents & Assets project (Agentes y Activos). This project brought Bolivianos and Americans together to reflect on the consequences of drugs and government drug policies on ordinary, low income citizens.

In fast appearing 2010, in Skid Row, we have 3 multi-phase performance projects in the works. "History of Incarceration" will combine historical research with expert lived commentary in generating a greater understanding of the societal costs of incarceration on the scale it exists here and now. "Let's Go", developed through improvisational workshops will articulate personal hopes, dreams and aspirations of community members. "Walk the Talk" a performance folded into a parade, will celebrate artistic and social visionaries who have lived and worked on Skid Row. We also have 2 public art projects in the works that will draw in a number of young artists from around Los Angeles to create their own works in collaboration with LAPD and Skid Row community members. We'll also produce the LA phase of a new international exchange project, with Netherlands based PeerGroupP.

Come view, or better yet, participate in our upcoming projects. Make a year-end donation and feel good about it, 'cause guaranteed we know how to stretch a dollar.

Much thanks,
John Malpede, for LAPD



YOUR SUPPORT OF LAPD IS GREATLY APPRECIATED

LAPD is a 501(c)3 non-profit and your donation is tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

Mail contributions to:

LAPD
PO Box 26190
Los Angeles CA 90026

Or donate via Pay Pal on
lapovertydept.org.

THANK YOU !



From left:
Kevin Michael Key, Carmen R. Pictor, Augusto Hinojosa,
Henriëtte Brouwers, Ariel Coca, Vïler Vidaurre

Agentes y Activos

In July, after months of Spanish lessons in our Echo Park office, four LAPD'ers traveled to Cochabamba, Bolivia for a seven-week residency and the Spanish language premiere of *Agents & Assets*, directed by John Malpede. The text is an edited version of 1998 transcripts from a hearing of the House Intelligence Committee on allegations that the CIA was complicit in the crack cocaine epidemic that ravaged minority communities in Los Angeles and other U.S. cities. We started performing *A & A* in 2000, when the California public was debating a treatment versus incarceration initiative, and we were working with a women's recovery program. Since then, we've worked with many recovery groups, recreating this performance in US cities and in the Netherlands.

In partnership with La Escuela de Arte y Talentos in Cochabamba the project brought together victims of the "War on Drugs" in Bolivia and those in the U.S., people whose lives have been radically impacted by drugs. We presented 13 performances of *Agentes y Activos* in six cities in a wide variety of circumstances: from prison, to municipal theaters, and central plazas to universities and high schools. The Bolivian audiences made all kinds of links between the reality there and the issues raised in the performance. We created opportunity for dialogue at every performance. People were supportive, and in some cases astounded, to meet Americans with independent perspectives.

The combined company 2/3 Bolivianos, 1/3 LAPD, worked intensively and had an esprit that really pulled together. One of our Bolivian cast members, Judge Yolanda Ramirez, was interested in theater and passionate about the issues addressed in the production. She facilitated the travel of one other cast member, a woman on parole who still had to report back to her. Collectively, we had many miles to travel (I'm talking metaphorically here), to both understand the complex issues of the performance, and to do the production in Castellano. We learned that demonization of the other is prevalent: Bolivians blaming the users in the North, while the American policy is predicated on the assumption that it's not our fault that we have a drug problem — that's why we go forth and eradicate. We learned that in both countries, it's not the kingpins, but the little people, the users, the mules that fill up the jails.

“

We really worked hard to prepare ourselves to perform in Spanish and it was one my best days when, after we performed at the prison, the guys came up and said they thought I was a “Cubano.” I was soooooo happy they thought that I actually was a Spanish speaker. The other cast members were very helpful, when they weren't laughing at us, and often knew our lines when we stumbled over the script. At times it was comical because we were relying on a single word for our cues, and the Bolivianos would ad lib, and we would be lost.”

KEVIN MICHAEL KEY
Skid Row resident & LAPD performer

In December 2008, LAPD produced “My Eyes are the Cage in My Head” an original work written and directed by Ron Allen, a poet, playwright and teacher who has had a close and important artistic relationship with LAPD for many years. “My Eyes” looks at contemporary life through the corrupted eyes of The Fat Man, who says “I breed humans for their function and they have become a brick wall called cities. Staggering medias of grief. They are boring realities. Oh well. Where’s the food. But I only eat power and cities. Women ah women. Humans are becoming obsolete.” Ultimately, “My Eyes” witnesses the demise of the Fatman as the everyday superheroes made strong through their daily hardships, break his psychic hold. We presented free performances at The Box Gallery, Chinatown; Church of the Nazarene, Skid Row; and at Industry Café & Jazz, Culver City.



Tony Parker, as The Fat Man

“
‘My Eyes’ depicts the reality of a tethered humanity in search of itself through desire and self-destructive relationships.”

RON ALLEN
 playwright & director

My Eyes Are The Cage In My Head



Rochelle Liggins as the alarmist in the library

CPR: A Public Training in Life-Saving Skills

LAPD (Lost And Presumed Dead) heroes shared the extraordinary wisdom that accounts for their return-from-the-edge, against-all odds survival in “CPR: a Public Training in Life Saving Skills.” The original production was developed in workshops in Santa Monica at OPCC, the network of shelters and services for low-income and homeless youth, adults and families, battered women and their children and people living with mental illness. It was the first collaboration between LAPD and OPCC, and enabled us to create a coalition between neighborhoods struggling to build better communities on Los Angeles’s east and west sides.

Directed by Henriëtte Brouwers and John Malpede, “CPR” was presented on May 1st and 2nd at Highways Performance Space as part of a celebration of the 20th anniversary of Highways and 18th Street Arts Center. The cast was a mix of accomplished LAPDers and OPCC residents. Half were first-time performers. Students from the ‘The Right to the Street’ class taught by Linda Samuels and mentor Dorit Cypis at Otis College of Art and Design created set pieces for the performance.

“
I’m shy. Coming and doing rehearsals and mixing in with different people, it’s really fun and getting out socially is helping me stay out of myself, and be a part of something I never thought I would be involved in.”

VINSON FULLER
 Skid Row resident & performer



From left:
Tony Parker, Ron Taylor, Terry Graham, Linda Harris

“
I think this is the best project ever to happen to me, and I love it. I hope we can obtain this project a longer time at Lamp.”

JESSE BUENROSTRO
LAMP resident & performer

Mr. Smallman Uses His Telepathic Powers to Fight for Justice In the Injustice System

In Fall 2008, LAPD began workshops open to all those in the LAMP Community and Skid Row. Since the beginning of LAPD, LAMP community members have invigorated LAPD with their creative input and output. LAMP provides immediate housing and lifelong supportive services for homeless men and women living with mental illness. Over 9 months of weekly workshops, we created “Mr. Smallman,” Through a non-stop improvisational process, with a character switching cast of 20-plus. We tested our telepathic powers with ESP cards and created the ‘dual of the future’, which is done only with the mind. With that we developed a whole bunch of short scenes based on a legal deposition from Mr. Smallman and extrapolated from cast member experiences and impressions of the criminal justice system. On May 5, 2009, we presented Mr. Smallman in the dining room of LAMP on Crocker Street.

“MAKING THE CASE FOR SKID ROW CULTURE”

In June, as part of a program of the Animating Democracy Initiative of Americans for the Arts, LAPD held focus groups to identify cultural resources in the Skid Row community. A research paper, “Making the Case for Skid Row Culture”, by John Malpede and Maria Rosario Jackson, from the Urban Institute, addressed the gap between the perception and reality of Skid Row. “It has been perceived as a place to dump what you don’t want,” said one participant, “but the fact is that Skid Row is the only answer in the entire region, for problems of homelessness, and recovery.” We will meet in January to present the paper’s findings to those residents and organization representatives who helped us do this work.

• WALK THE TALK

Much of LAPD’s work over the past few years has used art-making strategies to instantiate the achievements of Skid Row residents. Based on input from the community during last year’s Skid Row History Museum at The Box gallery and with the support of Los Angeles’s Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), we are now creating the outdoor public art project, the “Skid Row Walk of Fame”. We will build on that work with “Walk the Talk”, a year-long project that will include workshops, community conversation events, indoor and outdoor performances including a peripatetic performance (with brass band) that will travel through the neighborhood to celebrate the achievements of neighborhood visionaries, to bring the history of the community to life and keep it alive.

• HISTORY OF INCARCERATION

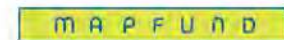
Skid Row has a disproportionate number of citizens with first-hand knowledge of the criminal justice system: through minor infractions like jaywalking or because when they’re released from state penitentiaries with \$200, they’re directed to Skid Row. This original theatrical production will employ local expertise through workshops and community conversation events to create a performative meditation on the consequences of living in the country with the highest rate of incarceration on the planet.

PEER GROUP COLLABORATION

The City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, Cultural Exchange International initiative is supporting the first phase of LAPD’s collaboration with Netherlands-based, PeerGrouP. LAPD will bring artistic director Sjoerd Wagenaar and director Floris Van Delft to LA to participate in History of Incarceration and Walk the Talk. In 2011 PeerGrouP will bring LAPD to Drente, the Netherlands for a residency project about the Cold War.



Creative Capital



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