

# ARMORY

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Exhibition: *Do you want the cosmetic version or the real deal?*

*Los Angeles Poverty Department, 1985-2016*

Exhibition Dates: Sunday, January 24 through Sunday, May 15, 2016

Opening Reception: Saturday, January 23, 2016, 6-8pm

Performance Dates: March 25, 26 and April 1, 2 and 3, 2016

Location: Armory Center for the Arts, Caldwell Gallery

145 North Raymond Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91103

## **The Armory presents**

***Do you want the cosmetic version or the real deal?***

***Los Angeles Poverty Department, 1985-2016***

**Thirty-year survey and new work by LAPD**

*Pasadena, CA* – The Armory Center for the Arts is proud to present *Do you want the cosmetic version or the real deal? Los Angeles Poverty Department, 1985-2016*, a survey exhibition with new work and performances by Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD), the Los Angeles-based performance group. The exhibition is on view in the Armory's Caldwell Gallery from January 24 through May 15, 2016. A reception, free and open to the public, will take place on Saturday, January 23, 2016 from 6-8pm. Performances will take place on March 25, 26, April 1, 2 and 3, 2016.

Founded in 1985 on Los Angeles's Skid Row by performance artist, director, and activist John Malpede, LAPD is made up principally of homeless or formerly homeless people and has been an uncompromising force in performance and urban advocacy for almost 30 years. *Do you want the cosmetic version or the real deal? Los Angeles Poverty Department, 1985-2016*, organized and originally presented by the Queens Museum, is the group's first survey exhibition and features extensive archival material, including photographs, texts, and ephemera, drawn from LAPD's archives. The centerpiece of the Armory's exhibition is the debut of a significant new installation and performance work entitled *What Fuels Development?*, which is newly

commissioned by Asian Arts Initiative (Philadelphia, PA), in partnership with Pangea (Minneapolis, MN), Armory Center for the Arts, and National Performance Network. Additional funding for the Armory's presentation of this exhibition and commission and presentation of *What Fuels Development?* comes from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Los Angeles County Arts Commission.

### **LAPD History and Archive**

The Los Angeles Poverty Department has documented its performances since its inception. In this exhibition, visitors can view original video documentation of *South of the Clouds* (1986), a series of idiosyncratic monologues generated from the performers' favorite physical activities; *No Stone for Studs Schwartz* (1987), developed improvisationally by LAPD from an imagined murder-mystery scenario that captured the dangers of living on the street at that time; selections from *LAPD Inspects America* series (1988–1994), a “kamikaze” performance residency in which core LAPD members would travel to cities across the US and Europe in order to devise and perform entirely new works with local homeless people; *Jupiter 35* (1989), which tracks the group's involvement in the recuperation of an LAPD member who had been thrown from a roof; and *Call Home* (1991), which, inspired by a statistic about the disconnection of homeless people from friends and family, involved a phone installed on the street that offered free calls to loved ones world-wide. *Red Beard, Red Beard* (2000), is a reenactment of Akira Kurosawa's classic film of a doctor and his impoverished patients in a rural clinic, and an important precursor to *Agents & Assets* (2001), both which will also be excerpted here. Home-video and television programming on and by the group is also included.

One of LAPD's major roles in the last decade has been to document and record the hidden history of Skid Row. From *Is there History on Skid Row?* (2002) to the three-day pageant *Walk the Talk* (2012/2014), a “peripatetic performance project” based on stories told by the visionaries of the district, LAPD members have interviewed Skid Row's old hands, mapped its changing borders, amassed files from its key organizations, and developed exhibitions, public art, and performances from that material. This phase of LAPD's existence will also be represented in the exhibition in a timeline, as a way of giving context to work that is extremely specific to its community but broad-based in its relevance to urban settings. Much of this material is culled from the Skid Row History Museum and Archive, established by LAPD in downtown Los Angeles in 2015, which foregrounds the distinctive artistic and historical consciousness of Skid Row. The Skid Row History Museum and Archive functions as a means for exploring the mechanics of displacement in an age of immense income inequality, by mining a neighborhood's activist history and amplifying effective community strategies.

Also represented are works on the criminalization of homelessness, *UTOPIA/dystopia* (2008) and mass incarceration, *State of Incarceration* (2010). These works emerged from LA's Skid Row to address these issues nationally and internationally.

**About *What Fuels Development?*, co-commissioned by the Armory**

*What Fuels Development?* is an installation that serves as a set for a devised theater piece exploring the mechanics of displacement in an age of immense income inequality, and Skid Row's fight to not be overwhelmed by an alcohol fueled entertainment district. The project, which is being debuted at the Armory, builds upon the shared interests of the Armory and LAPD in connecting the experiences of people to the social forces that shape their lives and communities.

*What Fuels Development?* builds on LAPD's long-term strategy of using art to re-knit the social fabric on Skid Row, a neighborhood recently acknowledged as "the last Skid Row in America." That Skid Row exists at all at this point in time is due to a fortuitous moment in the 1970s when the city was moved to implement a progressive development plan for the area that not only preserved the highly concentrated cluster of some 50 single room occupancy hotels in downtown but also augmented it by bringing a continuum of services to the same 50-block area. This was sometimes derisively referred to as the "containment policy," because it funneled poor people and services to Skid Row and away from other parts of the developing downtown. However, as a consequence of clustering housing and social services in Skid Row, the community has in the intervening 40 years cohered as an authentic neighborhood, with numerous grassroots initiatives devised and led by residents to benefit the neighborhood and also to advocate for their own interests within the context of the competing interests of the city and moneyed interests covetous of the real estate.

The devised performance component of the exhibition, *What Fuels Development?*, will incorporate a rich layering of lived experiences and collaborative reflection, and also make use of such "found texts" as public hearings by incorporating the location and setting into the overall conception of the production. The production in the Armory's Caldwell Gallery will be surrounded by images, graphics, and installation elements, and staged in the round with the audience in the middle. Performances will take place on March 25, 26 and April 1, 2 and 3, and will seek to parse out complex civic issues regarding contested space and competing definitions of "community vitality." The performances will be free; seating will be limited and reservations will be required.

The exhibition *Do you want the cosmetic version or the real deal? Los Angeles Poverty Department, 1985-2016* at the Armory originated at the Queens Museum. The Armory's

presentation of this exhibition, along with the commission and presentation of the new work, *What Fuels Development?*, is made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, California Arts Council Creative California Communities, and the National Performance Network (NPN) Creation Fund Project. *What Fuels Development?* has been co-commissioned by Asian Arts Initiative (Philadelphia, PA), in partnership with Pangea (Minneapolis, MN), Armory Center for the Arts, and NPN. The Creation Fund is supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Ford Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts (a federal agency). The Forth Fund is supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. For more information: [www.npnweb.org](http://www.npnweb.org). *Do you want the cosmetic version or the real deal? Los Angeles Poverty Department, 1985-2016* at the Queens Museum was produced with funding from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and National Endowment for the Arts. Project funding was also provided by Surdna Foundation and Institute of Museum and Library Services.

### **About LAPD and its contributors**

John Malpede directs, performs, and engineers multi-event art projects that have theatrical, installation, public art, and education components. In 1985, Malpede founded and continues to direct the Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD), the first performance group in the nation comprised primarily of homeless and formerly homeless people. LAPD's mission is to create performances that connect lived experience to the social forces that shape the lives and communities of people living in poverty. Malpede has produced projects working with communities throughout the US, UK, France, The Netherlands, Belgium, and Bolivia.

Malpede has received the Doris Duke Award, and New York Dance Theatre Workshop's Bessie Creation Award, San Francisco Art Institute's Adeline Kent Award, Durfee Sabbatical Grant, LA Theater Alliance Ovation Award, individual artist fellowships from New York State Council on the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, California Arts Council, City of Los Angeles's COLA Fellowship, California Community Foundation's Visual Artist Fellowship, and numerous project grants, and was a 2007-09 Fellow at MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies.

LAPD makes artistic work to change the narrative about people living in poverty, aiming to create a community of compassion and inspire the next generation of artists. Believing change is about exchange and that art is about surprise, LAPD has throughout its 30-year history confused the categories and confounded expectations. LAPD's projects have traveled to communities throughout the US, and Europe. Throughout the late '80s and early '90s the company developed *LAPD Inspects America*, a series of residencies at artist-centered organizations around the country that took the lived expertise of Skid Row to 20 cities to investigate emerging conditions of homelessness, bringing together, often for the first time, arts organizations, social services, activists, and homeless people to speak out in concert toward change. LAPD's recent projects on the depredations of the war on drugs and mass incarceration emerged from LA's Skid Row to

address these issues nationally and internationally. *Agents and Assets* has traveled throughout the US and Bolivia, convening people in recovery programs, communities devastated by drugs, and policy activists working to end the war on drugs and the mass incarceration resulting from it.

### **About the Armory**

Armory Center for the Arts, in Pasadena, California, believes that an understanding and appreciation of the arts is essential for a well-rounded human experience and a healthy civic community. Founded in 1989, the Armory builds on the power of art to transform lives and communities through presenting, creating, teaching, and discussing contemporary visual art. The organization's department of exhibitions mounts over 25 visual arts exhibitions each year at its main facility and in locations throughout the City of Pasadena. In addition, the Armory offers studio art classes and a variety of educational outreach programs to more than fifty schools and community sites.

Parking is available on the street or in the Marriott garage directly north of the Armory for free for 90 minutes. The Armory is off the Gold Line at Memorial Park – walk one half block east to Raymond and one half block north to the Armory. For more information please visit [www.armoryarts.org](http://www.armoryarts.org).

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