EVERY YEAR IN OCTOBER, members of the **Los Angeles Poverty Department** roam the streets of Skid Row looking for Skid Row Artists in the tents and cardboard dwellings, the hotels, the missions, everywhere. We always find lots of people who paint, draw, sing, write poetry, perform hip-hop, stand-up and many wonderful musicians. We invite everyone to come and show their art at the annual **Festival for All Skid Row Artists**, in Gladys Park on the 3rd weekend in October.

This year’s festival was the 8th with two days of perfect weather. It was the first festival to take place since the passing of our beloved MC KevinMichael Key. It was heart warming to see the support of the community, many people showed up to make the Festival a success in his absence. Festival celebrities like **CRUSHrow** (with Pit-bull and puppies) and **Unkal Bean** performed both days and helped to continue the spirit of inclusiveness, love and respect, which the Festival is known for. And an enthusiastic triumvirate of **Tone Tone Taylor, Charles Porter and Angelie Harper**, aka **Big Mama**, did a great job of keeping things rolling and holding a joyous creative space for over one hundred Skid Row Artists to shine on stage and around the park — where visual artists made and showed their work and people could attend workshops in photography, sitting yoga, register to vote, see some magic for kids, and much more.

The festival puts a spotlight on the artists in the community. And the artists and the entire community-audience testify to the existence and power of Skid Row. Amidst all the music and dancing the Festival also gives everyone in attendance an opportunity to weigh in on issues of neighborhood importance, this year that included the future of the built environment, access to public toilets and looking at the practice of community generated public safety. This year staff members from the **LA Department of City Planning** (DCP) were at the Festival to get input for the community plan they are proposing. Community members covered DCP’s area with post-it notes and their ideas. Also circulating in the park with a questionnaire for residents were members of the **Skid Row Now & 2040** coalition. Community comments will be built into the alternative community plan that Skid Row Now & 2040 is developing. In a salute to the efforts of the **Skid Row Community Improvement Coalition** and their work to provide toilet access to the community, the porta potties in the park were tricked out with flowers, artwork (the Mona Lisa — no less) and attended to by **The Toilet Lady** who offered air freshener, hand sanitizer and towels, and refreshing mints to everyone using the toilets, which were kept immaculately clean by **Brother Robert**. Thank you Robert!

As usual the day passed in harmony and crescendoed with dancing to the sounds of **Passion** on Saturday and **Franz’s Melting Pot** on Sunday. **Walter Fears** wears many hats at the festival. He drums with the **Skidroplayaz**, which is the house band, all day long. Together with **Sean Gregory** he is also the stage manager. Walter described the spirit of the Festival well and unequivocally in saying, “How this festival came about, was to provide artists a place where they could come and feel like they were a “quote” artist. We accept everyone where they are, allow them to display whatever art form it is… We are there for the artists. If there’s anything they need to make it happen on stage, if it’s something we can provide, then, we’re gonna do it…” A guy this year, he was a singer, but he never got to the song because he could not find the beat. He couldn’t find the beat. We spent 15 minutes trying to find this guy’s beat, but we couldn’t find it. But we allowed him to be the artist that he was. So next year when he comes again, we hope that he’ll have… the beat!” And that’s the spirit of the Festival: so find your beat and bring it next October. Until then: one & two, 1,2,3,4... Keep on, keeping on.


I’ve been doing martial arts since I was four. I guess as an North African and African American, just the African Diaspora quality of the culture gave me this connection that was not there in my day-to-day life as much and then. Growing in the art - it’s given me a way to understand other cultures. I now have a Masters in Counseling Psychology. I’ve done a lot of research in some methods of therapy that were developed in Brazil around capoeira and developed a capoeira-based therapy that I work with now. It’s about how we can connect soul to soul, conscious to subconscious. The unique thing about a capoeira-based therapy is that it has aspects of multiple arts because capoeira itself has music, dance, martial arts, acrobatics, literature that goes with it.

Capoeira practice arose in the 1600s during the dictatorship, and there was an anarchistic political bent to the therapy, so it was very beneficial both psychologically and socially for the people who were in it. But it also got stepped on harshly by the dictatorship so it started to fade away.

There used to be a few underground dance events that would happen in this area (Skid Row) and so you’d be here at night, parking, walking through the area, getting kind of an intimate relationship with people. At 3 in the morning, talking to people who a lot of people are afraid to approach during the daytime but it makes you realize that anybody in any situation is the same. It is just how we react to those situations and we can open our arms to people, have a dialogue or we can be fearful. It’s the choice that we make.

The festival is really nice. A lot of different people are doing a lot of different things in the same space. I see a lot of people connecting in one area and then going off to another area and dialoguing, so it’s really almost surprising to see such a vibrant community event happening here.
MELLOW BLUES: I think cleanliness is important. So whatever it takes — porta potties, showers, and we have to clean our hearts, so we need art. I will volunteer to sit in a circle once a week and read Maya Angelou, Adrienne Rich and all the writers who have helped me. I'd be happy to do this free, because if it heals me, it can heal somebody else. Word. Mellow Blues.

CRUZDOM: Without a doubt, the area is pretty much controlled by the community: the neighbors that live in the hotels and the tent-dwellers. Any plan has to be a plan with the grassroots. If they don’t feel like they own it, it doesn’t happen. Within this community, it’s not about what you have, who you are, how you look, what gender you are, or if you choose to not be the gender that you are. Here, they accept you for who you are. That’s what this community does more than any community. This community picked up on the LGBT thing before the world did. It has to be a strategic plan with the grassroots. With the community. That’s who it’s for, so if the community’s not understanding how they keep it and feel like they own it, it doesn’t happen.

MINU ABEYASINGHE: In small and big ways it happens every day when folks in the community come together to do anything from cleaning up the streets as individuals and looking out for their neighbors to more deliberate spaces that get created and talked about. Whether it’s Father’s Day that happens over here or the studio that I facilitate or UCEPP’s monthly coalition meetings that they hold and facilitate, this recognition that safety and security and comfort and accessibility are absolutely possible, is an integral part of a whole lot of groups on Skid Row.

RE-ZONING SKID ROW

On Saturday Brian Eck and Patricia Diefender from the Department of City Planning, spent the day enjoying the Festival, talking with residents and getting ideas on what the Skid Row neighborhood should look like and who should it house in the future. Eck and Diefender are in the midst of preparing the new community plan for downtown. The Skid Row community has been eager for dialogue with them, and DCP staff members have been willing to engage — having made several presentations and listening to community input at LAPD’s Skid Row History Museum and at The James Wood Community Center. Last summer 15 DCP staff members played zoning themed miniature golf on “The Back 9,” the installation designed by artist Rosten Woo and LAPD at the Skid Row History Museum. Neighborhood groups and residents have banded together to form “Skid Row Now & 2040” and this community coalition is developing a set of equitable development principles that they will share with DCP to lay the groundwork for continued dialogue. At the festival “Skid Row Now & 2040” volunteers (from Occidental College) engaged with residents to fill out questionnaires that are being used to generate the equitable development principles.

I was one of over 20 people who worked on a report that came out a few months ago called “No Place To Go: an Audit of the Public Toilet Crisis in Skid Row.” The point of the report is there is a huge disparity between the number of public toilets available in Skid Row and the minimum hygiene standard for a United Nations Refugee Camp. The report got a lot of media attention and now with Hepatitis A, the issue is even more serious. One proposed solution is to bring in portapotties and hire community members to monitor them. That’s what San Francisco does in their PH Stop program.

In Gladys Park, at the Festival, we set up a table next to five portapotties just to make folks portapottie experience a little more pleasant. We had some spray cleaner, toilet paper and paper towels, hand sanitizer, and in charge of the table was the Toilet Lady. We have air freshener, smells wonderful, and a fly swatter, flies like to be around the portapotties, and best of all are the mints. People loved the mints. They came back to the table again and again to get more mints. These were the best mints in the history of mints - next to a group of portapotties.

I had this white board and people could write on the board their answers to two questions: what is the biggest problem with toilets in Skid Row and how would you improve the situation? Forty people answered the two questions and I got to talk to them about toilets, which is my favorite thing in the whole world to talk about!

So what was the number one answer? Fifteen people answered the first question this way: NOT ENOUGH! and the answer to question number two: BUILD MORE!
Chas Jackson, Anthony Taylor, Charles Porter, Angelie Harper, Jen Wilson, Gary Anderson, Larry Swanson, Reggie, Stephanie Bell, Christina Collier, Jamaya Capri, Sherri Walker, Austin Hines, Henriëtte Brouwers, Walter Fears, Sean Gregory, John Malpede, Tom Grode, Los Angeles Poverty Department’s crew and staff:

...rights of people who live and work in L.A.’s Skid Row.

LAPD’s MISSION: LAPD makes artistic work to change the narrative about Skid Row and Los Angeles, to share the lived experience of our company and community members with the larger city of Los Angeles, and to amplify the voices of the people who live in Skid Row, in order to change the narrative about Skid Row and to amplify the voices of the people who live in Skid Row, in order to share the lived experience of our company and community members with the larger city of Los Angeles and the nation.

LAPD’s VISION: LAPD makes artistic work to change the narrative about Skid Row and people living in poverty. In doing so, LAPD aims to create a community of compassion, change individual lives and inspire the next generation of artists.

LAPD’s HISTORY: The Los Angeles Poverty Department has been working in LA’s Skid Row since 1985, hosting free performance workshops and creating art. LAPD was the first theater company run for and by homeless people in the nation, as well as the first arts program of any kind for homeless people in Los Angeles. Our original goals remain the same: to create community in Skid Row and to amplify the voices of the people who live in Skid Row, in order to share the lived experience of our company and community members with the larger city of Los Angeles and the nation.

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