



Year End Letter 2021

Dear Friends of LA Poverty Department,

2021 is wrapping up and 2022 is upon us. For LAPD, 2021 started on zoom and is ending with outdoor events, small indoor meetings of the vaccinated and masked, and -- a few weekly zooms.

We hope we will be able to continue on this trajectory in 2022, but LAPD has always been nimble and will adapt as necessary in the face of new variants.

While attendance at LAPD's Skid Row History Museum & Archive has been limited to small vaxxed groups, work on the archive has continued unabated. Archivists Henry Apodaca, Clancey Cornell, Zach Rutland and UCLA graduate intern Shawne West are organizing and making accessible our holdings for the use of residents, journalists, scholars and the general public.

"Unlike anywhere I have worked before, the Skid Row History Museum & Archive (SRHM&A) offers a dynamic and exciting environment in which to demonstrate media archival professionalization in a community archive. Unlike traditional archives, SRHM&A re-designates cognitive authority back into Skid Row by way of lived experiences documented. It is here where information (communication) and knowledge (survival) are on frontlines of activism, collaboration, and community healing. I was destined to work here." --- Henry Michael Apodaca, MLIS, Community Media Archivist.



Cubano Percussion performing at the Festival for All Skid Row Artists, in Gladys park, October 16, 2021

October 16, we once again held our annual Festival for All Skid Row Artists in person ---after last year's primarily Zoom version. Calling it the "Half-Way Back festival" it took place on a Saturday rather than the usual 2 days. Preceding the festival LAPD'ers fanned out over the streets of Skid Row to engage with the people living in tents --people who might not know about the Festival and the other arts opportunities that exist in Skid Row. We met rappers, poppers, gospel singers and painters who said they'd show up--- and most of them did. New and recognized community artists all turned out for a robust and schedule busting day of celebration. The tone was one of quiet appreciation, and confident expression of the strength of the community's valuation of the arts.

In May we performed our new performance "The New Compassionate Downtown", on the Plaza of MOCA Geffen. Our performance imagined a place where all downtown residents, from low-income to affluent, choose to reside, not because of night life, but because of the profound history of compassion, mercy, second chances and mutual aid that lives in Skid Row culture.

As LAPD performers articulated a future of co-dependence and grassroots mutual aid, where DTLA newcomers knowingly join a preexisting community of unhoused and low-income residents, I was struck by the contrast between this narrative and the recent struggles of the mainstream, institutional art "community," whose failure to take care of its own during the ongoing pandemic prompted many artists to divert more energy toward mutual aid both for art workers and others who were left in need due to systemic failures. --- Katherine Wagley, CARLA Magazine

Our performance makes the case for Skid Row, as does LAPD's work within the community coalition Skid Row Now & 2040. We've engaged artistically, collegially and formally (at hearings and meetings) with Department of City Planning, the City Planning Commission and representatives of our Council District DC 14 to inform the policy makers about the desires of the community. Nineteen recommendations from Skid Row Now & 2040 were incorporated into the Department of City Planning's Community Plan that is now on its way to City Council. Significantly, the plan includes an affordable housing only zone --- which is a first in the city. It protects Skid Row from displacement by more affluent renters and buyers. This was no easy lift --and is in fact a significant achievement.



The performance was accompanied by a publication from collaborator Robby Herbst, a 12-page tabloid "Compassion & Self-Deception: a guide to the moral crisis in Los Angeles." 3 public conversations, an additional element of the project brought together artists, front line workers, and clergy to further to explicate the notion of compassion in action.

Artistic engagement allows for a variety of ways to make your point. For one Department of City Planning Hearing ---on Zoom, LAPD submitted one-minute videos from 20+ LAPD'ers. The range of testimonies took the boring out of public testimony. While some cleaved to the facts and elements of our plan, others took commissioners on unexpected flights of imagination, transcending the limitations of Zoom ---through engagement with multi-dimensional human beings.

Coming up, as we arrive at 2022, we are working on the next iteration of Walk the Talk ---our biennial Performance / Parade that honors the visionary community building work of Skid Row workers and residents. “Walk the Talk 2022”, will take place on Saturday May 28. The parade route will be determined by those to be honored. Over 40 people have been nominated by Skid Row residents and previous honorees. This year’s honorees will be selected in December, interviewed and then LAPD’ers will begin to craft short scenes to be performed during the parade.

Everything, interview, transcript, and video of the performances will be available on our Walk the Talk website <https://app.reduct.video/lapd/walk-the-talk> The Walk the Talk parade, like our Festival, is an event that reaches the unconnected people in Skid Row and in an informal and joyous manner brings them into the social matrix of the neighborhood.

No matter where life seems to take me, I always come back to the archive, it’s home. I’m continuously inspired by with the way LAPD marries history telling, performance, and activism- none seems to be possible without the other. It’s a privilege to take part in the stewardship of these stories, and a daily reminder that community is everything. --- Clancey Cornell, SRHM&A, Archive Manager.



In 2021, we published and distributed in Skid Row a beautiful book designed by Tiffanie Tran, of the 2020 Walk the Talk --- as that “parade” took place on Zoom rather than in the streets. The book featuring portraits designed by Man One, photos and the scripts of the Walk the Talk performances, got Walk the Talk back out into the Skid Row community.

We are also very excited about our new Community Curation Project. For the first iteration of the program, we will be working with Charles Porter, long time prevention director for United Coalition East Prevention Project. Charles has been instrumental in bringing the community together and has used a variety of modalities including music and poetry as means to do so. LAPD is working with Charles to generate performative and exhibition / installation material and events that will express his concerns and strategies for building a healthy community.

Art is about surprise.
May all 2022’s surprises be good ones.

Warmly,

John Malpede
Director

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