

## PHILANTHROPY

# Celebrating Art

## Beautiful things can come from unexpected places

By **Karen Schaffner**  
LA Downtown News Staff Writer

Skid Row residents can have their say on Saturday, Oct. 26, and Sunday, Oct. 27, at Gladys Park, 808 Gladys Avenue.

Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD) staff is inviting residents to take the stage with a song, a poem, a scene from a play — any performance that expresses the performer.

There will be opportunities for visual artists as well, with creation stations and a place to exhibit their work.

It's part of the LAPD's 15th annual Festival for All Skid Row Artists, which runs from noon to 4 p.m. Associate director Henriëtte Brouwers expects about 100

artists to perform and create.

"It's a lot of people who go through there (performing)," she said, "and then we have all these creativity stations and tables where people can exhibit their art, and we hang it on the wall and on the fence."

For this festival, the definition of artist is loose.

"We don't do auditions or ask, 'Are you an artist?'" Brouwers said. "We say, 'If you just want to read a poem, that's cool. Just share it with each other.'"

The festival opens with longtime participants, such as Skid Row drummers.

Though not unhoused, Skid Row resident Lorraine Morland is a member of the LAPD. She said they surprised her by



During the pandemic, Lorraine Moreland used the paints the staff at Los Angeles Poverty Department sent her to create hearts.

(LAPD/Submitted)



Lorraine Morland, who used to be homeless, found a supportive community at the Los Angeles Poverty Department.

(Lorraine Morland/Submitted)

helping her during the pandemic.

"It's an amazing organization that helps people who are homeless and don't have a lot of self-esteem, it allows people to come and they teach us to do plays and the most important thing is help people navigate hard things in their lives," she said.

For example, Morland spoke about the pandemic, when she couldn't go out. The LAPD staff sent paints to her.

"I said to my dog, 'What am I going to do with these paints? I don't paint,'" she said. "What I did was I started throwing paint on paper and I remembered when I was homeless how they worked with the people one person at a time, so I looked at it as one heart at a time. I started making hearts with my hand."

From there she made a book of hearts.

Skid Row actually has official boundaries, established in 1976. It goes from Third to Seventh streets and from Main

Street to Central-Alameda.

The LAPD began simply enough. It was founded in 1985 by director/former/activist John Malpede, who had moved to Los Angeles from New York to work as an outreach paralegal at the Inner City Law Center.

He began by leading theater workshops for the unhoused. They were the nation's first performance group comprised of mostly homeless people. It was also the first arts program of any kind for Los Angeles' homeless population. LAPD has grown significantly since. It has its own museum and archive at 250 S. Broadway Boulevard.

The theater performances are developed and workshopped by the unhoused participants and tell their personal stories. Regular rehearsals occur at least twice a week and anyone who keeps showing up can be in the show. Actors are paid.





The annual Festival of Skid Row Artists features many musical groups

(LAPD/Submitted)



More than 100 performing and visual artists will take the stage at the annual Festival of Skid Row Artists.

(LAPD/Submitted)

However, there is more than theater happening at the LAPD. There are exhibitions and panel discussions to name a couple. Participating in these activities offers at least one very important positive outcome.

"All these activities build community," Brouwers said. "People come for the rehearsals, they get to know each other and it builds social networks, right? That's really the basic, positive thing that happens... (LAPD) has always been about the community, showing that there is a community of real people that make art and that advocate for themselves and bringing the issues to a broader audience."

The LAPD is an arts organization and does not provide food or other supplies. However, food and clothing will be available at the festival. Sometimes, Brouwers said, people ask for these items.

Another positive outcome for Skid Row residents is how healing creating art can be.

"Many people have been traumatized for all kinds of reasons and just being homeless is traumatic," she said. "Making art is really a healing thing for people to do. It builds relationships, but it's also a way of expressing yourself and healing."

Morland has also observed the healing.

"We do music, we do art, we do poetry," she said. "(Participants) have a new-found way of carrying on in the world and they rise up above that ground and that situation that they're in. It's not overwhelming to them anymore because we have a place to give love and dignity back to the people and that's

where it starts. They start rising up like flowers... No matter how they look, they become a star."

It can sometimes be difficult to get the word out that Brouwers is calling for artists to participate. There is no internet on the street unless someone sits in front of a Starbucks and people don't have computers so she goes on foot and talks to people to personally invite them to the festival.

"Two weeks before the festival we go all over Skid Row and sign people up," she said. "We walk the streets and we invite them to come and explain what it is. That's really the way to do it, to actually talk to people."

Isn't it dangerous?

"It's not, because if you just walk and you just talk to people and you are respectful to people, people are very happy to talk to you," Brouwers said. "That's the thing. You take your time and if people want to talk to you, you talk to them. That's a very important part of it, really."

More than anything, Brouwers wants people to know that the festival is special.

"This is the only festival that is by the people of Skid Row for the people of Skid Row and anybody else who wants to come," she said. "It's not, 'Oh, we'll hire a big band.' It's a completely different idea. It's really from the ground up."

The festival has another important aspect.

"People take care of each other," she added. "There are no police or security guards. If there's a problem, we solve it ourselves and there has never been a problem in 15 years. And there are really, really good artists in the community."

**The 15th Annual Festival of Skid Row Artists**

**WHEN:** Noon to 4 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 26, and Sunday, Oct. 27

**WHERE:** Gladys Park, 808 Gladys Avenue, DTLA

**INFO:** Any resident of Skid Row interested in performing should look for LAPD staff when they come around, or email Henriëtte Brouwers, [info@lapovertydept.org](mailto:info@lapovertydept.org), or call 213-413-1077

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