



2011

December 2011

Dear Friends of LAPD;

This newsletter will update you on our recent projects and those that lie ahead.

We feel that Skid Row is one of the most important social incubators anywhere, a place where people are creating responses to some of society's most urgent problems. Our current project, Walk the Talk, combines public art and performance to tell the story of transformative initiatives coming from people living and working on Skid Row.

We lead off with a story by KevinMichael Key that tracks the development of his friendship with fellow LAPD'er Ronnie Walker and simultaneously describes their personal development within LAPD and The Skid Row Community.

Very sincere thanks to all who supported our just-ended successful on-line fundraiser to tour *State of Incarceration*.

Read on –and if you care to, make a donation via paypal on our website or in the mail.

Thank You,
John Malpede



Cast of 'State of Incarceration'



KevinMichael Key Ronnie Walker

Eyewitness Report
by KevinMichael Key:

***The Birth of "Pretty Ronnie"
and the Skid Row Renaissance***

I perked up when I heard the inmate on the lower tier yell, "Hey New York." Were they calling me? The question was answered when I heard another chime in, "Tell us again how you do your time?" I'm from New York but I knew they weren't talking to me 'cause this was my first stint in a State Prison. "New York's" answer made us all laugh, "Aw man I don't never have no trouble doing my time, I just write letters to old girlfriends." When our cell doors opened, I raced out to meet my fellow New Yorker and to check out whether he truly was a New York "stepper." During our time together in the "Big House," we became, as my momma used to say, "Thick as thieves," walking the track like Level 1 yard killers. In other words, pseudo-tough guys who couldn't punch their way out of a wet paper bag, ala the Richard Pryor and Gene Wilder "We bad" scene in *Stir Crazy*. Meeting "New York," was the second best thing that happened to me at Tehachapi.

**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
<http://lapovertydept.org>

info@lapovertydept.org

THANK YOU !



State of Incarceration @ Highways Performance Space

State of Incarceration 2011 performances:

January 28-29 and February 4-5 at Highways

June 15-18 as part of RADAR LA Festival

"This latest work from Los Angeles Poverty Department doesn't just tell audiences what it means to be trapped in the California penal system. It dropkicks them into the experience, with inescapable force." David C. Nichols --- L.A. Times

Anyone who attended LAPD's, "**State of Incarceration,**" will recall the tall, graying actor, "Pretty Ronnie Walker's" sterling portrayal of a spaced out inmate who gets in trouble because he fails to respond to the "Yard down!" warning and then dissuades the pill pushing shrink from medicating him because, "I don't do drugs in jail." It was 2004 when I first met "New York". Over the last 5 years I have taken great pride in watching him grow and mature into the actor, "Pretty Ronnie," LAPD core member. Today we can laugh about those times in Tehachapi because we both have found a way to live, work and thrive, in LA's Skid Row, **The World's Biggest Recovery Community.** I am especially proud of my friend because of what he has endured over the last 5 years. I had already begun my sobriety journey when we met. He got out, stumbled and fell before plugging into our community resources and discovering that life as "Pretty Ronnie" LAPD thespian, could help him stay out of harm's way.

Without a college degree, and wearing multiple convictions all over his resume, finding work to suit his skill set was almost impossible. So, for the last 4 years, New York, aka "Pretty Ronnie Walker" has been wearing a neon green uniform daily, while earning a living retrieving gentrified poop along the upscale streets of The "New" Downtown LA. The job pays minimum wage, has no benefits, holiday pay or over-time compensation. Worse yet, he never misses a day, not because he loves his job...he just can't afford an unpaid day off. "That **is** a job I would never take." I'd say to him right after calling him over to point out some fresh doggie-do to clean up.

Skid Row is a very special community, and our LAPD is a very special group within its boundaries. Our members are residents of the poorest neighborhood in Los Angeles, yet our projects have secured us an international reputation. We tell our stories in ways that are both vivid and undeniable. The community is populated with an amazing number of artists and many perform in the streets, parks, alleys and rooftops, wherever and whenever they can. Often they are targeted and harassed by businesses and authorities because they lack institutional support. Our **Festival for All Skid Row Artists** provides this support. Recently we had to postpone our 2nd annual artists' festival, until **January 27/28, in Gladys Park,** because the high winds wrecked the park. LAPD does this festival to showcase the numerous unsung talents who live and perform in and about Skid Row. So many performers and visual artists participated last year, that we added a second day to the festival. Just as utilizing his talents as an artist helped transform street slick, hip and cool "New York," into Pretty Ronnie, by nurturing his creativity while enduring his present grim reality, it is our hope that this festival will help others get thru another dreary, desperate day on the streets. It is amazing and exhilarating to watch people come out of their shells while performing. I can't wait to see who and what we uncover and discover this year.

My friend Pretty Ronnie recently made another discovery, he found a new mo betta job. I asked him for a job description, "My old job was picking up shit, on my new job as a counselor, I get to talk shit." Well all I know is that his "Shit" talking helped me in Tehachapi and I never went back to prison. Maybe he is on to something.

Dec 4, 2011 LAPD's **Festival for All Skid Row Artists** filled Gladys Park with visual art and performances that demonstrated the abundant grass roots cultural vitality of the Row. Skid Row is the place where people pull rabbits out of hats, creating art and transforming the community at the same time.

COME see for yourself JAN 27-8, 2012 for our expanded 2 day, 2nd annual 'Festival for All Skid Row Artists'.

Gladys Park, corner 6th St. and Gladys, noon to 4 pm.



SKIDROPLAYAS

WALK THE TALK and Public Artworks

In April 2012, a long process of community engagement that's included performances, exhibitions, public conversations, interviews, drawing, writing, singing and improvising will culminate in a multi day peripatetic performance, **WALK THE TALK**.

LAPD will invite the audience to travel with us through Skid Row, guided by a brass band that will lead us to 36 places associated with the achievements of community visionaries living and working in Skid Row. The performance will animate the neighborhood and bring the history of the community to life.

The conception of this project is to honor people who live and work on Skid Row and who have made it one of the most significant areas for solving the problems that other people have given up on. *One of the original goals of Los Angeles Poverty Department is to create community on Skid Row and to employ the voices of the people who live on Skid Row to communicate the experience of living there to the larger community of Los Angeles and to the nation.* This project started in 2002 with the LAPD installation / performance series **Is there History on Skid Row?** and continued with 2006 to 2011 activities: **UTOPIA/ dystopia** where, in preparation for the performance, LAPD created events that engaged community brainpower to identify initiatives and people who had made positive contributions to the neighborhood. We invited some of the most widely recognized social visionaries from the neighborhood, and they were asked to speak about other people and initiatives that they valued. The input led to the installation, **Skid Row History Museum**, at The Box Gallery, which included more performance and public conversation events, to solicit further community input.



Jeff Dietrich and Catherine Morris



With the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles, LAPD is creating 36 permanent public artworks with images of neighborhood visionaries whose actions have contributed to re-knitting the social fabric of Skid Row, designed by Mr. Brainwash. Mr. Brainwash is, along with Shepard Fairey and Banksy, one of the most recognized street artists in the world. He has also gained a huge amount of recognition for his gallery shows in New York, Europe and Asia. As a street artist he has had ongoing interaction with people who live on the margins and an education in compassion and understanding. We expect to install the artworks around the same time as WALK THE TALK.



Clyde Casey

Some of the people portrayed in the public artwork and whose stories are told in WALK THE TALK are:

Jeff Dietrich and Catherine Morris, joined the Catholic Worker in 1970 and continue to provide dignified dining, hospice care, and advocacy to thousands weekly. The Catholic Worker example has spawned other initiatives that together have transformed the standard of community service from "charity" to empowerment.

O.G. Man, community artist and initiator and commissioner of the Skid Row 3 on 3 basketball league and a project that provided trashcans - hand painted - because the city didn't provide any for the neighborhood.

Robert Sundance, an alcoholic who, in 1979, successfully sued the city, with the result that alcoholism became a public health issue rather than a criminal issue.

Rosa Arzola and Jill Halverson who in 1979 created the Downtown Women Center, providing the first decent housing for women on Skid Row.

Mike Neely, who started the Homeless Outreach Project. HOP employed formerly homeless people to engage with and support their peers in obtaining services and opportunities to get off the street.

Mike Neely on why he started HOP: "One of the things that didn't happen was that homeless people didn't get a chance to participate in solving the problems of homelessness. We were always operated on. They weren't going to let us in the operating room unless we were knocked out as the patient. So I figured one way or another we needed to get in the operating room, and if nothing else, we could do something."

INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS



COLD WAR

a performance project, developed over 3 years by the PeerGroup and Los Angeles Poverty Department

The finished piece will be presented as part of the Noorderzon Festival in Groningen, the Netherlands, from 16-26 August 2012.

The City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, Cultural Exchange International initiative has supported two phases of this collaboration between LAPD and the Netherlands-based PeerGroup. Both groups create theater work that engages with current social issues, but the communities they work with are very different: PeerGroup builds projects in rural locations in Drente and L.A. Poverty Department builds projects in the heart of Skid Row, downtown LA.

We started the research in October 2010, when two members of the PeerGroup, Floris van Delft and Valentijn Fit, came to work with LAPD and to do research for the Cold War performance project here in Los Angeles.

This year 3 LAPD-ers went to the Netherlands where we exchanged our research, distilled from piles of books and internet-sites, with 3 PeerGroup-ers and together we started to develop performance material. The last 10 days of our stay were spent in Berlin, Germany. We walked the line of the Wall, visited many museums, spoke with East- and West Berliners and invited them over for dinner, which we cooked in our apartment in Pankow, where we also had our studio. We created a wall length timeline (from 1945 till 2011) that linked our personal experience to world historical events and invited our guests to add to it. We improvised with this material and created texts based on existing texts and our personal writings.

Excerpt from an interview with women from **Paula Panke**, a women's center in East Berlin.

I lived in a very small village. My grandfather went to war and came back a changed man: he never wanted to talk about it. We never talked about politics. We were very poor, no running water or toilet in the house, but we had a garden and we had enough to eat. We were happy. After the Wall fell our teachers started teaching us about the rest of the world. From one day to the next the socialist system was not the only possible, right system anymore. I could not understand it. I could not believe in my teacher anymore. It was as if we all had migrated to another country, only, we had not moved at all...

SONG:

G Em
Only the birds are flying from East to West Berlin
C D
Aren't whistled back, nor shut down
G Em
Over the wall, over the Iron Curtain
F C G G
Cause they'd like to be both in the west and in the east
F C G G
Cause they'd like to be both in the west and in the east

We walked down to the Brandenburger Tor (Brandenburg Gate) with 7000 people during Occupy Berlin and had many conversations that gave us insights in the effects of the Cold War on every day life, right now, in Berlin and our own lives in the Netherlands and America.



A Micro History Of The World Economics, danced is a performance written and directed by French director Pascal Rambert.

He is the director of Theatre de Gennevilliers, a national theater in Gennevilliers, a low-income suburb of Paris, France.

'A Micro History' has been performed in France and Japan and we are planning to re-create the performance in Los Angeles with a combined cast of 45 Angelinos and a French group of 4 actors and an economist. The LA group will consist of 30 performers: a mix of LAPDers and other performers in the age range of 7 – 77 years old, and a 15 member choir.

This November Pascal Rambert came to LA to introduce the project and to find the right performance location. Pascal really liked the football field of the **Edward Roybal Learning Center**, which has the big LA Banks as a backdrop. We also spoke with Ken Martinez, head of the theater department of the **Ramon C. Cortines School of Visual and Performing Arts** to see how we can involve their students. While here Pascal taught 2 workshops to engage interested artists to his process. 50 people participated in the free workshops that included writing and bodywork. It was an enthusiastic group of LAPDers, students and artists. The production will be rehearsed and performed in 2013. This will entail 2 weeks of rehearsals and 2 or 3 performances. This production marks another chapter in the ongoing artistic exchange between LAPD and Pascal Rambert. Los Angeles Poverty Department, which is co-producing the project, collaborated with Pascal on his piece **RACE**, that was performed on top of a parking lot in downtown LA in 1999, and in 2008 LAPD was in residence in Gennevilliers for 2 months to create **RED BEARD / RED BEARD** with 40 community members and 5 LAPDers, directed by John Malpede.

LAPD in colleges and universities

LAPD participated in the *Arts in One World* conference in Cal Arts and made presentations at Scripps College, Woodbury University and the Otis College of Art and Design Public Practice Program. Otis Public practice students assisted us in installing prison beds in the performance space, mounting our gallery exhibition and in photo documenting our State of Incarceration performances at Highways. And Otis students were on camera participants in our “Warhol-esque” 9 hour movie of 184 Californians, each reading a page of the court decision on overcrowding in the CA prison system.



LAPD and interested university faculty have been looking for ways to create ongoing college /university interactions. Several are in the works. In January we are beginning an longterm involvement with Otis’s Integrated Learning Program.

Right now, Michael Willard’s Liberal Studies students at Cal State LA, are working with LAPD in the transcription of our interviews with community visionaries for our forthcoming production *Walk the Talk*. This work is time consuming, but fascinating—and integral to our creative process for this historical piece. While transcribing, the students get to hear of the work of inspiring Skid Row people, some of the history of the neighborhood and the policies that have affected the lives poor people in America-- from those directly affected by them. Liberal Studies students will be working with us in producing our *Festival for All Skid Row Artists*, January 27 and 28. The Festival is our way of aggregating the grass roots cultural assets -that is artists- of Skid Row. Again, working with Cal State LA faculty and students, we are hoping to generate a social scientific mapping of Skid Row cultural assets this year.



LAPD exhibitions

LAPD contributed to exhibitions *Police and Thieves* curated by Karla Diaz and Mario Ybarra Jr. at the Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago; *Living as Form* exhibition curated by Nato Thompson for Creative Time, NY, participated in the *Portraits in Dramatic Time* directed by David Michalek at the Lincoln Center, NY and the *Critical Campout* by Los Angeles Urban Rangers at MOCA.



The *Police and Thieves* exhibition brought together current artistic production in Los Angeles and Chicago that deals with the historical and inherently conflicting power dynamics between law enforcement and crime. *Timeout Chicago* wrote: “In Los Angeles Poverty Department’s videotaped performance **State of Incarceration** (2010), actors (many of them ex-convicts) play prisoners and guards in a gallery filled wall to wall with bunk beds—just as a California jail would be. The video conveys such an environment’s mind-warping claustrophobia and sadism with devastating efficacy.”



LAPD collaborated on the Urban Rangers **Critical Campout**, at the Museum of Contemporary Art. LAPD members conducted walking tours from MOCA to Skid Row and back and led writing sessions for people taking the tours. Other LAPD’ers conducted story circles and shared material we’re working on for *Walk the Talk*, our upcoming performance about people who have done transformative work on Skid Row. The tour concluded with a “campfire” discussion at MOCA, with LAPD’s KevinMichael Key and Becky Dennison of the Los Angeles Community Action Network that explored the effects of the evolving ecology of art and gentrification in Downtown L.A.



LAPD participated in David Michalek’s **Portraits in Dramatic Time**, a video work that was projected onto a gigantic 85-by-45-foot screen hung before the façade of the David H. Koch Theater as part of the Lincoln Center Festival in New York. In June LAPD’s Ronnie Walker, Riccarlo Porter and Austin Hines traveled to New York for the filming of LAPD’s contribution. Thirty plus actors and groups, from a variety of world theater traditions and including some well known Broadway and film actors, were featured in 10 second narratives of their own creation. Shot at 3,000 frames per second in ultra-high definition, the narratives became ten-minute movies when projected on the face of Lincoln Center.

LAPD’s **Agents & Assets** project was featured in the *Living as Form* archival exhibition that presented exemplary socially engaged projects from locations around the globe. The *Agents & Assets* (2001-ongoing) project seeks to give voice to people whose communities have been most devastated by drugs and counterproductive drug policies. LAPD participated with documentation from the various iterations of the project from Los Angeles to Bolivia and including several objects from the set and costumes. A digital format of the exhibition is scheduled to tour internationally.



UPCOMING

Now through Summer 2013



FESTIVAL FOR ALL SKID ROW ARTISTS

January 27-28, 2012, 12-4 PM Gladys Park

2nd annual The first festival was one-day event.

This year's is two. ***Come visit this year's!!!!***

WALK the TALK

performance dates: April 24-29, 2012

A walking, talking and music making parade traveling Skid Row, and stopping for sidewalk sized performances at the exact spots where 36 extraordinary people have made done their community transforming lifeswork. Many of these amazing people will join us for concurrent community conversations.

All 36 community builders faces will forever grace Gladys Park in a ravishing public artwork created by Mr. Brainwash.

COLD WAR by the PeerGrouP and Los Angeles Poverty Department

Feb.13-25: residency PeerGrouP in Los Angeles & July 15- Aug. 15: residency LAPD in Drente, the Netherlands

Aug. 16-26: performances at Noorderzon Festival, Groningen, The Netherlands

BIGGEST RECOVERY COMMUNITY ANYWHERE

Fall 2012: beginning of work process, anticipated performance of finished work: May 2013

LAPD will start a new performance project that highlights the fact that Skid Row is one of the most significant recovery neighborhoods in the country. Homeless people living in tents and boxes are the visible, static image of Skid Row.

The dynamic reality of people transforming their lives and community is not a photo op.

Biggest Recovery Community Anywhere explores the personal meaning and cultural significance of the recovery culture in Skid Row Los Angeles. This performance will reveal the multi-faceted lives, struggles and aspirations of people transforming themselves and their surroundings, those who would otherwise be invisible. As someone who works in the neighborhood pointed out in a forum we convened: "[Skid Row] has been perceived as a place to dump what you don't want.. But the fact is that Skid Row is the only answer in the entire region, for problems of homelessness, and recovery."

3rd annual FESTIVAL FOR ALL SKID ROW ARTISTS: Fall/winter 2012

That's right, building on numbers 1 and 2. Next years will be constructed in response to this year's.

STATE OF INCARCERATION Installation/Performance residencies

Fall 2012 through Summer 2013 Exact dates to be determined.

LAPD's State of Incarceration, addressing prison as a surrogate social welfare system will tour, as a residency project to New Mexico, Arizona and New York. The performance will be created in each location with a combined cast of LAPD'ers and local residents who've lived what they are talking about. Host producers:

VSA Arts of New Mexico, North Fourth Art Center Albuquerque, NM.

Tucson-PIMA Arts Council, Arizona.

The Queens Museum, NY.

Pascal Rambert's 'Micro History of World Economics, danced' : Spring 2013

LAPD's 3rd collaboration with Pascal with 5 French performers and 45 from LA and LAPD.

Photography by Matt Mayes, Henriëtte Brouwers, Jeseca Dawson, Pascal Rambert, Hayk Makhumuryan, Tom van Eynde, Dorottya Mathe, Creative Time, Anne Maike Mertens



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