



Year End Letter 2016

Dear Friends of LA Poverty Department,

Los Angeles Poverty Department's 31<sup>st</sup> year has been busy.

2016 started with The Pasadena Armory for the Arts retrospective gallery exhibition on LAPD, (from January 2016 through May). This iteration of the retrospective expanded upon the exhibition that originated at New York's Queens Museum, where it received significant attention in 2014. It included a new installation of a "trendy restaurant" which was fully utilized in *What Fuels Development?*, that we created and performed at the Armory in March and April. *What Fuels Development?*, chronicles and extrapolates from a true life fight in which Skid Row residents, mobilized by LAPD member KevinMichael Key and other community activists / residents convinced Zoning Commissioners to stop a project that would have placed a full-bar restaurant in a hotel inhabited by people in recovery.

Travis Diehl, writing for **ARTFORUM** described *What Fuels Development?* as **"...an impassioned dramatization of a true life fight ...a specific episode to counter the abstract surety of gentrification."**

We recently took the performance to Philadelphia, and in conversations there it became clear that the performance and the story behind it can be mined for organizing ideas applicable elsewhere. We intend to flush out and incorporate these ideas in future *What Fuels Development?* residencies.



And in Skid Row, the momentum from the win portrayed in *What Fuels Development?* continues to benefit the neighborhood: with non-profit developers backing away from any idea of putting bars in supportive housing situations; preventing two former drug recovery buildings from being converted to market rate housing, and with getting the Los Angeles Neighborhood Council to refer a property owner seeking to develop projects in Skid Row, to first get support from the Skid Row community.

*We performed Chasing Monster's from Under the Bed*, at The Hammer Museum and at UC-Riverside. *Chasing Monsters* concerns both recovery from mental illness and police violence against the mentally ill. The **LA Weekly's** Best of LA issue, chose LAPD as the **"Best Creators Of Political Art Shows"** and referred to *Chasing Monster's from Under the Bed*, as an **"...unflinchingly political performance in response to the 2015 police shooting of Charly Keunang, who went by 'Africa' and was mentally ill."**



Excerpts from *Chasing Monsters* and from our 2011 performance, *State of Incarceration* were presented at our February joint fundraiser with Critical Resistance that was initiated by KevinMichael Key and Critical Resistance's Jess Heaney and featured Angela Davis. The event drew an audience of 1,000. The night was dedicated to a consideration of the 'radical imagination' and included a penetrating conversation between Davis, Fred Moten and Melanie Cervantes.

In May our third biennial *Walk The Talk* parade highlighted the achievements of an additional wave of Skid Row community builders and advocates and featured the Mud Bug Brass band, portraits of the honorees, performances derived from the words of each honoree and dancing down the street by everyone in the parade. The dancing continued at October's 7<sup>th</sup> annual *Festival for All Skid Row Artists*. The Festival had the free and connected form of an ongoing jam session, as musicians were inspired by poets and vice versa and as musicians picked up on one another's sounds. Gladys Park levitated at least one inch off the ground for at least 33 seconds.



As we enter 2017, we are continuing to pursue the topics of gentrification and what truly constitutes public safety. With support from the inaugural round of grants from the Mike Kelley Foundation we are opening a much ballyhoo'd playable miniature golf exhibition themed on the zoning and community plan changes now moving through the city government. These plans could have very deleterious effects on the future of the Skid Row community. LA Times and The Guardian of London covered the announcement of the project. **The Guardian** ran the headline “**Los Angeles and New York artists tackle the inequity of real estate.**” Civic / Visual artist Rosten Woo will be designing the course and the process will include public design workshops that will disseminate understanding of the possible public policy changes and harvest community ideas for the mini-golf design. The exhibition will be installed and playable for 5 months. While the exhibition is open LAPD will create a performance **The Back 9**, a fict-u-mentary that explores the public / private duality of the process of generating plans for the future of downtown.



Our Project **Public Safety for Real** will work to articulate a community alternative to the aggressive policing that has forever been the norm on Skid Row. With support of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation's "Artist as Activist program" LAPD will continue the conversation started with *Chasing Monsters from Under the Bed*, in reaction to the police violence that killed Charly Kuenang.

With support of the Surdna Foundation, **The Skid Row History Museum and Archive**, our multi-purpose art space at 440 S Broadway has hosted exhibitions, performances, rehearsals, a film series and community meetings. Recent exhibitions have included Lamp Art Project's *Dream Walk Exhibit*, Clayton Campbell's photo project *Words We Have Learned Since 9-11* and *Walk the Talk* an inter-active history of Skid Row. Our *Free Movie Night at the Museum*, which takes place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Fridays of the month, organized by Andrea Iannone, is the place to be for meaningful films addressing social issues.

The digital archive of Skid Row History Museum and Archive, designed by tech wizard Rob Ochshorn is about to go live --- giving visitors the experience of searching and aggregating the words of many important Skid Row community builders as they address issues of housing, policing, development, arts, community and more.

We're moving forward in 2017, despite the grim national environment. Arts continue to be important means to confound the literal minded, the closed minded, the dogmatic, and the bigoted, and to empower transformation. Artists everywhere can take a strategy lesson from Muhammad Ali when he famously said he was going to, "Float like a butterfly and sting like a bee".

We're already seeing depression instantly transformed into reflection and strategic action. Let's work for Los Angeles to tack progressive with greater concern and policy change to reduce inequality everywhere, defend the civil rights of everyone and to respect the community voice of Skid Row. Our LAPD, The Los Angeles Poverty Department, will continue our work toward those ends.

We hope to see you engaged in 2017 and we appreciate your support.

For Los Angeles Poverty Department,  
John Malpede & Henriëtte Brouwers



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