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P.O. BOX 2, VENICE, CA. 90294 • www.venicebeachhead.org • free@venicebeachhead.org • 310-827-2329

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It Takes A Village ... To Keep It A Village

By CJ Gronner

I have to admit, I'd never attended a LUPC (Land Use and Planning Committee) meeting in Venice before October 2nd. I, like my friends and neighbors, was compelled to go in absolute opposition to the new hotel proposed at 1033 Abbot Kinney Boulevard. A HOTEL! What?! NO. That was the gist of the entire sitting and standing room only meeting at the Oakwood Rec Center, where even the youngest Venetians jammed in shoulder to shoulder to use their voices against yet another project determined to turn Venice all upscale and not Venice anymore.

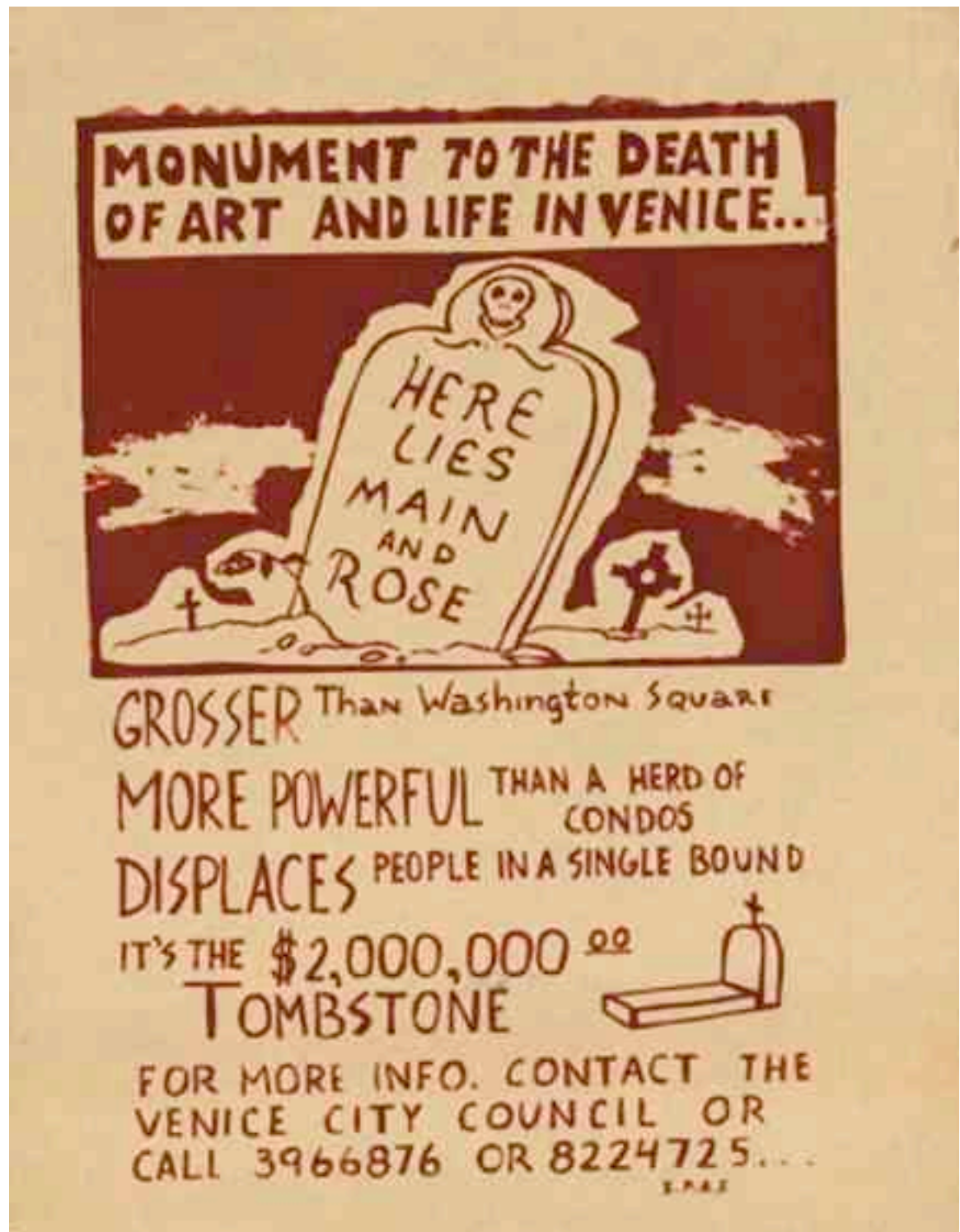
Led by committee chair, Jake Kaufman, in a bit of an abrasive, tough guy manner ("If you even whisper, I'll point you out in front of everyone and ask you to leave."), it was clear that almost 100% of the folks in the room were there for the hotel issue, in the hopes of "Keeping Venice eclectic," which was mentioned several times. Outside you could hear the kids playing basketball and having fun after dark, which only added to the community aspect of it all.

The team behind the hotel, led by the new land owner, Dan Abrams, kept their presentation very short, and stood there with crossed arms and sullen faces while listening to what came in the next two hours. They seemed to think that it was a big deal that just that very afternoon, they decided to take the proposed fourth floor off of the project. They announced that change a couple hours before the meeting in an open letter on Yo Venice, in a move that smacked very much of the old trick where you ask for way bigger to come down to the scale that you really want in the first place. To seem like open guys, "listening to the community." Almost no one in there was buying it, or having it. Many said, "Disingenuous," about it all. When Abrams said, "A lot of people want nothing to go on this site - that is not an option." To which someone yelled out, "Yes, it is!" and everyone else clapped (and got scolded for it by Kaufman). The removal of the fourth floor also eliminated affordable housing that was originally included, something Venice NEEDS - far, far more than some posh boutique hotel.

This whole deal is still in the very early stages, which is why it was so heartening to see such a massive turnout for a preliminary meeting. Venice people know what they want - and what they for sure do NOT want - and they're not afraid to speak up.

All citizens were to be kept to a one minute speaking term, unless they respectfully asked for two, which many did. It was on a first name basis in there, and Tibby went first, setting the tone when she said, "I do NOT support this project," and surmised that committee member John Reed had already taken a side and was advocating for the project. It did feel like that as the night went along, as he kept sticking up for it all. Joan said that the "concession" to three floors is still absurd when all the other buildings are one story, and shows a lack of understanding of the community. A community of walkers, bikers, artists, and activists that already struggle with the congestion on Abbot Kinney, a main concern.

Doug read a letter from someone that couldn't be there and then said his own, and powerful, piece. "I'm TIRED of the poor being kicked out of Venice! This gentrification was funded by gang wars and crack cocaine!" He riled the place up, earning claps and shouts of agreement. Gail was opposed. She said Abbot Kinney is successful as a tourist attraction, but we don't want to become victims of that success. The PEOPLE gave it the color, diversity, and eclecticism that made it so, and they're being driven



Carlos Callejo, "Monument to the Death of Art and Life in Venice", circa 1970s. Credit: Center for the Study of Political Graphics

Poster relevant today, as we continue what seems to be the same fight. Victory through perseverance!

— Continued on page 8

Using Art in the Struggle for Social Justice

By Eric Ahlberg

The intrepid Venice Beachhead reporters went over to the new offices of the Center For The Study of Political Graphics (CSPG), where Venice Artist Carol Wells and her colleagues have created an archive of 80,000 political posters from around the world.

Carol Wells: This project started in Venice. It started in my apartment on Dudley. I first moved to Venice in 1967.

Beachhead: What was your original intent when you started CSPG?

Carol Wells: My training is as an Art Historian. From high school on, I have always been involved in social justice. I wasn't an organizer, but I would wear my buttons and write for the school paper. In college it was protesting the Vietnam War. I attended the Century City Demonstration in 1967, which started out peaceful, and then became a police riot. The next day in the L.A. Times they stated that the demonstrators had started the riot, and I was shocked that the newspaper would print a lie. I graduated college and moved to Venice later that year. I went to grad school, still opposing the Vietnam War. In 1981 I went to Nicaragua for the first time.

I wasn't interested in posters, I was interested in social justice and the Nicaraguan Revolution. While in Nicaragua in 1981, I saw this young child, an eight or nine year old boy, mouthing the words on a poster. In translation it said, "In constructing the new country we are becoming the new woman." I happened to know that his parents were very anti-Sandinista, so here he was confronted by a Feminist Revolutionary Poster, nothing that he was exposed to at home, and he was trying to figure it out.

That's when I had my epiphany about how posters work. They attract your attention as you are just going about your life, you don't have to go to a museum. A poster attracts you by its bright color, its bold graphic, its slogan; it's a combination of the three. It makes you think, it makes you ask a question, and the act of asking a question changes you.

We walk through the world in our bubbles, assuming we know everything we need to know. A poster has the ability to break through that bubble, and make us think about a world we don't know about. It also works for people who agree with it. If you are opposed to war the corporate media treat you as a fringe crazy, and the posters will say hey, you are not alone. Posters work for people who don't know anything about it, people who don't agree with it, and for people who agree with it.

I became addicted to collecting posters from that moment. It became a way for me to combine my two passions: art and politics. I collected my first poster, curated my first exhibit, and gave my first talk about politics and art in 1981. The first exhibit I co-curated was a Nicaraguan Poster Exhibit at UCLA. We then re-curated it for exhibition at SPARC. They had more jail cells then (the SPARC building was formerly the Venice Jail) and I combined it with an artist named Doug Humble who was working with CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador). He made installations of prisoners with full size models in the jail cells, and then we had all the Nicaraguan posters of the Revolution outside the Jail cells.

Somebody saw that exhibit and said, "We've got this cultural center in San Diego, can you bring it down when you are through here?" My husband Ted Hajjar and I put the exhibit in the car and drove it down, and I gave a lecture. Then somebody said their sister does solidarity work in Colorado, could they fly me and the exhibit out there? I spent 1981 to 1989 going cross country with the exhibit or with a slide show. Every place I went I would ask them to take me to their left bookstores, because that's where all

— Continued on page 10



Beachhead Collective Staff:

Karl Abrams, Anne Alvarez, Greta Cobar, Don Geagan, Dean Henderson, Mary Getlein, CJ Gronner, Ronald McKinley, Alice Stek.

The FREE VENICE BEACHHEAD is published monthly by the Beachhead Collective as a vehicle for the people of Venice to communicate their ideas and opinions to the community at large. The Beachhead encourages anyone to submit news stories, articles, letters, photos, poetry or graphics of interest to the Venice community.

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Mail: P.O. Box 2, Venice, CA 90294.
Email: free@venicebeachhead.org
Web: www.venicebeachhead.org
Twitter: twitter.com/VeniceBeachhead

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Dear Beachhead,
Thank you for your articles on our murals! The original 15c wash and the 5c dry mural was so famous that anyone who wanted to be anyone came to be filmed in front of it. Bobby Darren was there with his photographer to soak up the ‘hip vibes’ to assist in changing his image. We thought the Fine Art Squad’s Venice in the Snow was gone, beautifully rendered in composition with the Squad and friends depicted as well as the Boardwalk Venetians in winter attire. Tragic that it is now unable to be seen, with a building erected inches away. But here a tribute must be paid to those who bought the lot next to 15c wash and the 5c dry mural, art lovers who shaved one of the corners off the building so the mural could be seen from the street. Where has such gentility gone? We must resurrect it in Venice. Quickly.

Sincerely,
Laura Shepard Townsend

Thanks for your generous donations!

- Venice Beach Oceanarium
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- Electric Lodge



Column on Windward and Pacific damaged by a tour bus coming from Santa Monica and making a left turn onto Windward.
Photo: Greta Cobar

Historic Preservation Architect Says: Restore the Column!

The historic Corinthian order column cap damaged by a tour bus is one of the most character defining features remaining of Abbott Kinney’s Piazza San Marco inspired Venice of America colonnades on Windward Ave. The column cap designed by Felix Peano, (Ref: Jeffery Stanton) should be reconstructed as soon as possible to reduce any further deterioration of the remainder of the column cap.
The tour bus company that hit the column is responsible to reconstruct it. That is why they carry property damage insurance. It is the City’s responsi-

bility to make that claim and if they don’t, a private citizen or organization with the help of an attorney on a contingency can make the claim. Those columns belong to the citizens of Venice.
As far as originality goes, few restored historic buildings have all their original parts. Even the Statue of Liberty is reconstructed. The National Park Service that administers the Register of Historic Places, not only approves but encourages restoration and reconstruction of character defining features as a necessary long term process to give continued life to historic buildings. Hell, everything wears out if not restored.
We have lost so much of the original Venice of America, we all need to demand that what remains is protected, and when damaged repaired.

– John Ash, AIA,
Historic Preservation Architect

Dear John,
Thanks for your informative letter and your expert advice. The Beachhead would be delighted to work with you on pressuring the city of L.A. into filing the insurance claim needed to repair the column. Please email us soon.

Many thanks,
Beachhead Collective



Calling on Venetians to get on board the Airport-to-Park Train!

By Martin Rubin

Although the City of Santa Monica owns and operates Santa Monica Airport (SMO), we Angelenos experience most of SMO noise and air pollution. Is there anything we can do that will make a difference, or is it a waste of time to get involved? Can I interest you in a Great Park? This is not a pipe dream. A coalition has formed to strengthen efforts to close SMO. One very reasonable question has been asked over and over: if SMO closes, are we to get a Playa Vista or Century City development in its place? Since SMO is public and not private land, plans for how the airport land will be developed will be put forth by the City of Santa Monica and its voters. Santa Monica resident activists have stepped up their efforts to hold their City Council accountable to the will of their constituents. And what is the will of Santa Monica residents? For those who reside near

SMO, the will is to either curtail operations significantly or to close the airport altogether. Significantly means eliminating flight schools along with their toxic lead pollution as well as the toxic air pollution and ear-splitting noise from jet traffic. Many have expressed interest in closing SMO altogether for a number of valid reasons. I am firmly situated in that camp. However, so many are not aware of the cost of SMO, both environmentally and economically. Santa Monica tax payers have been subsidizing SMO over the years to the tune of 15 million dollars. So the 1% of the 1% have been getting taxpayers to help them travel in style. On Sunday, September 15, fifty-five bicyclists gathered to tour the perimeter of Santa Monica Airport and learn about airport environmental and land use issues. Ironically, as they stopped by the Centinela Avenue entrance to the airport listening to a description of the millions of dollars in subsidy costs to

the City, a \$200,000 convertible Aston Martin DB-9 drove up and a middle aged man with his eye candy honked at the group so they could get by and enter the gates to the jet center. Fifteen minutes later a private jet took off accompanied by ear-splitting noise and tons of toxic air pollution. Do we really need this kind of an airport? Concerned Residents Against Airport Pollution (CRAAP) at www.jetairpollution.com; Community Against Santa Monica Airport Traffic (CASMAT) at www.casmat.org; and Sunset Park Anti -Airport (SPAA) at www.sparesidents.org are saying that a great park would benefit so many more in so many ways. The three groups hooked up together forming the first cars of the Airport-to-Park Train. You can get on board too. Visit the above websites and www.airport2park.org. As is often the case, the people need to make it happen. This train ride promises to be enjoyable.

Plane Crash: One More Reason to Close Santa Monica Airport

By Greta Cobar

A private jet carrying four people and three pets crashed at landing into a hangar on the side of the runway at Santa Monica airport. If the hangar wasn't there, the plane would have crashed into the rows of residences situated only 150 feet from the site of the crash. The flames that immediately erupted burned at a temperature higher than most fires because jet fuel was involved. The fire damaged three big buildings. Before the September 29 plane crash, the Beachhead was the only newspaper to publish articles advocating for the closing of the airport come 2015, when its lease runs out. Written mostly by Martin Rubin, director of Concerned Residents Against Airport Pollution (CRAAP), the articles focused on the pollution that Venice residents have been subjected to, as the flight path of the planes is over Venice, not Santa Monica. Following the crash, dozens of other publications and political figures have spoken in support of closing the airport. Mark Benjamin, 63, owner of one of the largest construction companies in Southern California, and his son, Luke, 28, have been identified as two of the people on the plane. The identities of two women who were also on board have not been released at this time. Two cats and one dog were also on the plane. The crash had no survivors. The hangar destroyed was partly owned by Tony Bill. His aerobatic plane, truck and motorcycle were destroyed. The cause of the crash is under investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board, which is currently closed because of the government shut-down.

The plane was a twin-engine Cessna Citation coming from Hailey, Idaho. It veered off the runway and slammed into the hangar upon landing at 6:20pm. Current efforts are focused on transforming the airport into a park, and the Sierra Club has officially endorsed such efforts. Santa Monica City College, which already operates in newly constructed buildings on the grounds of the airport, would have an excellent opportunity for expansion. Art shows that periodically take place in select hangars could also widen and branch out. As tragic as this plane crash undoubtedly was, it symbolically put jet fuel on the years-long efforts of Venice residents to close the airport. Because it only serves private planes and jets, the airport caters to only a small percentage of Santa Monica residents. However, it provides consistent noise and air pollution to many others. A park, on the other hand, would serve many more, provide silence and clean air. The Airport-to-Park train has already been put in motion, so jump aboard and enjoy the ride!



Flames and smoke following the September 29 plane crash in Santa Monica, 150 feet from rows of residences.

"I have long thought that the airport should be shut down, and I feel the same way today. The airport is a proven danger to nearby residents both from the risk of crashes and from growing evidence of pollution and emissions from the jet fuel. Sadly, this is déjà vu all over again."
— Mike Bonin, City Councilperson

"These homes experience not just potential safety dangers, but also jet exhaust blowing right into their living rooms. Noise is a concern as well."
— Ted Lieu, State Senator

"The one option that we know that really isn't under consideration is status quo. The airport will not remain the same as it is now."
— Martin Pastucha,
Santa Monica Public Works Director

"In July 2015, the City of Santa Monica's 1984 agreement with the FAA expires. We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to re-purpose an enormous and unique land parcel as our largest park. Let's build a park!"
— Martin Rubin, CRAAP

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Menotti's Coffee Stop Opens On Windward

By CJ Gronner

Way back in the day, there was Menotti's Bar on Windward. Then came the Prohibition Era, and it became Menotti's "Buffet", a little grocery store to serve as cover for the Speakeasy downstairs, which also served as a distribution center for the liquor being smuggled through the underground tunnels from the off-shore ships hauling it in. Well, now we can all drink freely, but Menotti's is making its return to Venice with the opening of Menotti's Coffee Stop, next door to our current Speakeasy - the Del Monte/ Townhouse.

As the owners of The Townhouse, Louis and Annette Ryan, continue to expand and honor the historical roots of Venice, they have turned the empty space now filled by Menotti's into a gorgeous venue for your neighborhood coffee fix at the beach. They also found the very best guy to run it, Christopher "nicely" Abel Alameda, a true coffee professional and three-time World Latte Art Champion. He KNOWS his coffee. And his name is nicely (because he played "Nicely Nicely" in *Guys and Dolls* and kept getting voted "Most Courteous" in school!) so you know you're going to get good service.

Alameda is from Far Rockaway, New York (and you can hear it in his accent) but began his career in coffee when his Mother moved them to Seattle when he was 15 for a better life out West. Seattle was pretty much the world coffee center at the time, and Alameda learned his trade at Espresso Vivace - known internationally as a center for "coffee technique". Contacts made there led him to leave Seattle for Venice and a job at Intellegentsia. He considers his time spent there to be his "Grad School" in coffee. "I was embraced by Venice while I was there, even in such a sterile environment." When he felt they were getting a bit too corporate for his taste (and mine), he embarked on his "accelerated business school of coffee" at Handsome Coffee downtown. The back of his neck features a tattoo tribute to all of the above places, showing how seriously he takes it all.

While at Handsome, Alameda was approached by Derek G. Taylor, who is in business with the Ryans. Taylor explained that the Ryans were interested in opening a coffee venue next to The Townhouse on

Windward and asked if Alameda would be into partnering up with them. With his first son about to be born (the darling baby Abel) to Alameda and his lady, Kailani Rodde-Ector, they were looking for somewhere close to home for him to work (Kailani was born and raised in Venice, and they have made their happy home here). Alameda appreciated that "Menotti's is going to be a Mom and Pop place, because Louis and Nettie are a Mom and a Pop. We want to focus on raising our family in a great family town." The Ryans have raised their own children here, and he liked that it was going to be a family operation, geared to our locals. We like that too.

As Alameda explained, "The Ryans are interested in doing positive and beautiful things for Venice. They take care of their businesses and the history behind them." To that end, Menotti's truly has that sense of place that could only be Venice. The tables are old whiskey barrels and the cream and sugar holders are liquor bottles, both tipping their hats to the original vibe of the place. The counter is made of the original tin ceiling of the place. The music will be played on a record player - vinyl. The Four Barrel Coffee (from San Francisco) will be made on a special La Marzocco machine (in a custom turquoise shade to match the ocean outside). The pastries will be sourced by our friends at GTA. There will be record listening parties, photo exhibits, seminars to make your own coffee at home way better, and always an excellent place to stop in and get your caffeine and say hi to friendly faces that you know.

"What's left of the REAL Venice is the community engagement," said Alameda. I both second this and appreciate it. We NEED people like this to honor our past and establish a new classic Venice spot for years to come. Menotti's is pure Venice, top to bottom, and I hope you will join me in warmly welcoming them, supporting them, and thanking them for helping to keep Venice Venicely.

Menotti's Coffee Stop will be open daily 8am - 8pm.



Christopher Abel Alameda with wife Kailani Rodde-Ector and baby Abel.

Photo: CJ Gronner

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Zipline Leaves Juan Smelling BS

By Greta Cobar

Following their promise to leave only footprints, Flightlinez removed the two towers supporting the zipline and are in the process of restoring the grass that was uprooted when the towers were installed. Unfortunately, the process of restoring the grass involved a stinky fertilizer that stunk up parts of Ocean Front Walk for days.

Business at the Sidewalk Cafe was negatively affected by the foul smell according to Mason, who works there.

In spite of the stench, Venetians have been delighted to see the ocean-view-obstructing zipline gone.

“It’s finally quiet again,” said Vivianne Robinson, whose Name on Rice stand on OFW is right in front of the location where the zipline operated.

The best news is that they did not make their anticipated profit, and therefore will probably not return. Their loss should stand as a testament and warning to other similar attractions that might consider coming to Venice.

“Our goal was to have 350 riders per day, but we did not touch that,” said Brina Marcus, marketing director for Flightlinez/Greenheart, in a conversation with the Beachhead.

The so-called attraction was sold to Venice residents under the pretext that it would provide money to the city of Los Angeles to clean and maintain the bathrooms in Venice. Three months later, the bathrooms are not any cleaner. This should stand as a testament to us Venetians to not be fooled again, and to remember that it is the city of L.A.’s job to clean our bathrooms. Such cleanup should never be contingent on an ocean-view-obstructing attraction operated by a company in Canada.

“Financially it doesn’t make sense for us to come back as temporary because setting up and tearing down is time-consuming and costly,” Marcus told the Beachhead. “To become a permanent project, however, would take anywhere between 18 months to 3 years, and it would involve permits and processes with the California Coastal Commission,” Marcus said.

“I can’t divulge anything we learned,” Marcus told the Beachhead. She was not able to tell us the average number of riders per day, nor the amount of money the city of L.A. received from Flightlinez. According to the contract, the city was supposed to



Juan Alcala sniffing the stench of the fertilizer placed where the Zipline towers ruined the grass. “I smell BS,” he said.

Photo: Greta Cobar

receive 15 percent of gross profit. By the low number of riders that residents have witnessed throughout the summer, there might not have been a profit.

Meanwhile the Venice bathrooms continue to offer third-world conditions and to stand as a violation of basic human rights. Busy summer weekends witnessed hour-long lines, lack of toilet paper and no locks on doors. Of course we get annoyed when people pee in our neighborhoods, but where are they really supposed to go when nature calls and there is nowhere to go?

In Santa Monica they have new, state-of-the-art, well lit, clean bathrooms with plenty of paper and other basic necessities that we, over the border, see as fancy.

Cityhood is the difference between Santa Monica and Venice. They get to spend their money on what they choose, while all of the revenue generated in Venice goes downtown L.A. and we are left crying and begging like an ignored step-child.

The city of Los Angeles annexed Venice in 1925, following the discovery of offshore oil. The citizens of Venice at that time voted in favor of annexation, but the vote was rigged by just-arrived implants, who were moved to Venice right before the vote. In addition, Venice citizens were misinformed

and threatened that without annexation, they would have no more drinking water.

Add this to the barricades the city of L.A. put against Venice cityhood: the entire city of L.A. would have to vote on and approve a current de-annexation. However, only the citizens of Venice voted to approve the annexation in 1925.

If Venetians were allowed to decide and vote upon, we would have our own magnificent city of Venice with the grandeur of yore. There would be no need for an ocean-view-obscuring zipline in the vain hopes of having clean bathrooms. One way to achieve that would be to change the requirement that the entire city of L.A. needs to approve de-annexation, and allow Venetians to once and for all decide for themselves.

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Hot off the Press: New book of dissident political cartoons by Khalil Bendib, the only LEFT cartoonist LEFT in America!



Political cartoon by Khalil Bendib

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The Merchant of Venice

By Delores Hanney

Today Mike T. lives a life of gracious bohemianism with his longtime love Laura. He's an artist; she's a writer. Their enchanting Venice home and its 800 square-foot studio behind are hidden from view by thriving gardens swoony with scent and color, tinkling chimes and little surprises tucked in here and there. Sometimes they are in residence enjoying a mellow, mystical lifeway. Other times, when fortunate travelers have taken up occupancy, they load up their trailer and sally off to bask in the alternate pleasures of San Juan Capistrano, San Clemente, Laguna, Monterey or some other lush by-the-sea location: a pair of nature-enthralled gypsies in a rolling abode. But back in the time of hippies, Mike was part owner of a psychedelic book store-cum-gallery, an emporium purveying all manner of accoutrements, trappings and regalia for enhancement of the 1960s counter culturists' lifestyle.

The Earth Rose, as it was called, was located at Ocean Front Walk and Rose Avenue, where the Venice Ale House currently stands. Next door a Jewish delicatessen was operated by Holocaust survivors; the hotel across the street was known as the Ocean View in that era. The shop came into being when Mike threw his lot in with trust fund endowed Steve Richmond who made a hobby of casual entrepreneurship. "He was an edgy kind of guy, a poet and both of us were pretty weird," Mike told me. "Steve was responsible for 'content,' mostly books of poetry or spirituality." While Mike was the ambiance maker and finder of groovy merchandise irresistible to hippy taste, they shared the role of shop clerk and chatter-upper of whoever happened to walk in. Keeping a surfboard at The Earth Rose, with his current girlfriend or Richmond watching the store, he regularly nipped across the sand to surrender to the sea for a deliciously mind-altering hour of riding the surf, his co-passion along with painting. "Painting and surfing bring similar feelings of being put in touch with something bigger than me," he says.

The building the shop inhabited was roughly 3000 square feet, with thirteen-foot ceilings and a bright red floor. Aurally permeating the space, music by the Jefferson Airplane, Country Joe and the Fish, the Grateful Dead and suchlike ripped and roared from the sound system.

A large painting of a rose, similar to the one that now decorates the Rose Café, reigned as emblematic



Mike T. Remembers The Earth Rose - illustration by Mike T.

greeter above the grand double door entrance. Inside, the walls were filled with the work of local artists, including Mike and a guy who made a specialty of dayglow colored scenes from the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. There were posters from the Fillmore Auditorium, San Francisco's famed rock venue. Square black tables covered in lace displayed jewelry and there were racks of handmade items of leather clothing. They sold incense, Indian rugs, beaded curtains. Before long they expanded their inventory to openly include drug paraphernalia: pipes, rolling papers and whatnot. It was a charmingly notorious enterprise when considered from the perspective of today's medical marijuana peddlers common as cabbages along Ocean Front Walk.

"The store was the most visible feature on the boardwalk, as merchants were then few," Mike reports. The gathering of a gaggle of comfortable chairs around the cash box area helped create a relaxed, clubby atmosphere for hanging out that brought a kind of focus to the community. Ray Manzarek – of The Doors – and members of the nearby Strawberry Fields commune were frequently countable among the throng of congenial regulars.

From this it grew into a neighborhood resource that under the auspices of others was part of a free food program and additional grass roots services. It also provided public meeting space supporting issues of humanitarian concern.

The Earth Rose was a modest success, financially, but its incarnation was a brief one. The inevitable demise oozed from the fact that neither of the owners was a sit-around-all-day-and-watch-the-shop sort of chap. Richmond bought Mike out but shuttered the doors not long after, because it just wasn't fun anymore.

Faced with a delightful dearth of daily duties, Mike T. pootled off to Oahu (one of the Hawaiian Islands) to be a part of the North Shore surfing scene's golden age for nine months. Returning to Venice, he resumed painting with renewed vigor and was taken to the bosom of the booming L.A. art crowd. A few years later he was inspired to travel to Europe in the role of manufactured mescaline evangelizer for the incredible spiritual highs it induced. As a mission the trip was a bust, but just being there was an epiphany for the artist in him. Back at home again, his art flourished. In time Laura arrived.

And The Earth Rose was only a memory.

Change in Peace and Freedom Party Leadership

A large turnout of Peace and Freedom members overwhelmingly elected new officers on September 27 to head the Venice P&F. Outgoing Chairperson Karl Abrams wished them well and pledged to help make the transition as easy as possible.

The new officers are primed to continue and expand the activist orientation of the Venice Chapter. During the fight against pay parking in Venice (OPDs), Venice P&F printed and distributed more than 10,000 postcards throughout the community. It also played a key role in the unsuccessful fight to save the Venice Post Office. In the past, it has held more than 100 marches, rallies and pickets against Bush's, and now Obama's, wars. Venice P&F has fought for a Free Venice, including cityhood, for the

rights of poor and homeless Venetians, against police brutality and against gentrification.

The Cindy Sheehan campaign for governor gives us an opportunity to campaign against fracking (which Gov. Brown supports), for full employment, free health care and education, and affordable housing, in addition to issues specific to Venice. The Peace and Freedom Party also is in favor of abolishing the out-of-control NSA and for ending all foreign wars and using the billions of dollars now going to the military for social programs which will allow all of us to engage in "the pursuit of happiness."

– Jim Smith



Above: Outgoing Peace and Freedom Chair Karl Abrams
Below: Peace and Freedom Party booth
Both at the 2013 Abbot Kinney Festival

Photos: Greta Cobar



Newly elected officers for the Venice Chapter of the Peace and Freedom Party
L to R: Alice Steck, Treasurer; Eric Ahlberg and Suzanne Thompson, Co-Chairs.

Photo: Jim Smith



The Venice Symphony Orchestra - Good Vibrations

By CJ Gronner

When I first heard there was going to be a Venice Symphony Orchestra, I thought it was just about the best idea ever. Then I heard them, and that is now confirmed. Led by founder/director/conductor/musician, Wesley Flowers, I just heard the VSO play for the first time at the September Venice Art Crawl, and as their tag-line goes, they did indeed play everything "From Beck to Bach." Beautifully.

Flowers grew up in Georgia, playing the bass and piano - a little. As life goes, opportunities spring up and you either grab them or you don't, and when Flowers was offered a gig playing on tour with Butch Walker, he grabbed it. Flowers played with Walker for five years, and that gig is what first brought him out to Los Angeles. He found that he didn't like L.A. at all, but when he came down to the beach in Venice - near the studio they were working out of - he said the clouds parted and he knew these were his people. I've heard that same story so many times - and told it - where people arrive in Venice and just either get it or they don't. The ones who get it stay ... and then do their best to not only preserve what they loved about it upon arrival, but to add to it in creative and positive ways. That's just what Flowers set out to do, right from the beginning.

After attending a performance of the Santa Monica Symphony Orchestra, Flowers was blown away - and then even more so to find that Venice did not have an Orchestra of its own. What?! A creative hub of the entire world did not have an Orchestra?! Something had to be done. Flowers approached some friends with his idea, and Venice architect/developer Jason Teague thought it was a fantastic idea, and said that Flowers was exactly the kind of person we want living in Venice. Exactly right. Teague helped to get a non-profit set up, and Flowers was off to the races, recruiting musicians through Craig's List, Yo Venice and The Free Venice Beachhead. The VSO had their first performance in the fall of 2012 at The Electric Lodge, where they were also allowed to hold rehearsals. Flowers said, "This is the only town this could happen in." Everyone is a volunteer at this point, everything has been donated, and all are in it for the love of music.

The music. With so many talented musicians in town, there has been a kind of revolving door of VSO members thus far, as everyone has busy schedules and also need to make a living, so sometimes well-paying gigs need to take precedence while the VSO gets up, running, and more self-sufficient. Watching them perform at last month's Art Crawl, one would have no idea that there was so little time for the group to rehearse as a whole. The program (Mozart AND "Good Vibrations"!) was flawless and had the entire audience jam-packed (with a line down the block to get in!) into Teague's shipping container compound applauding and elated that we now DO have a symphony orchestra of our own!



Venice Symphony Orchestra performing during the September Art Crawl

Photo: CJ Gronner

Their hopes are to keep growing, to offer free music lessons to at-risk local youth, have free performances for the neighborhood, tour with the VSO, have a permanent home (how about a concert hall in the Windward Circle?!) to play in, have a staff, score films, stage a performance at the end of the Venice Pier ... the great ideas are really endless. To make them a reality will require help and support from our whole community. You can donate through their website. You can sign up for "LivnGiv" where participating restaurants donate 20% of your tab to the VSO, at no extra cost to you. You can book them for a private function (what a great work holiday party idea!). And as the membership is now only about 1/4 as big as Flowers would like, you can dust off your own instrument and join in on the music-making!

"We put the Venice in symphony orchestra," Flowers said, and added that the people and the music selections are "funky enough to be the VENICE Symphony Orchestra." It's great to see a younger generation not only getting involved with orchestral music, but creating it for the whole community to

enjoy. "I think we can revolutionize the movement and redefine what an orchestra can be. We can reinvent the classics, while still honoring them, and incorporating things like electronic music, because it all ties together." A pretty apt mission statement for an orchestra for Venice, California if you ask me. I think Abbot Kinney would not only be proud of these guys, but would probably see a little bit of his dreamer self in them ... and the part that then goes out and makes it happen.

Celebrate the music of Venice! The Venice Symphony Orchestra will be playing monthly at First Fridays at Trim Salon on Abbot Kinney, at the next Art Crawl on December 19th, and wherever our town books them to share the gift of their music.

Please support our VSO. Contact them at Veniceorchestra@gmail.com. Like them on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/veniceorchestra>) Sign up for LivnGiv (<https://www.livngiv.com/los-angeles>) and select VSO as your cause. Thank you, and Enjoy the music!!!

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– continued from page 1: It Takes A Village ... To Keep It A Village

out. "All that will be left is an over-developed, congested, gridlocked mess ... I object to this project in TOTALITY." Lara was concerned about this development setting a precedent, and losing all the diversity of the neighborhood.

Joe, Antoinette, Chris, and many other voiced concerns that the hotel was going to be across the street from an elementary school, and with a roof-top bar, pool and transient hotel guests, it might not be the best idea to have all that swirling around little kids. Everyone seemed to agree on that.

Traffic was a major issue, and most speakers mentioned it. As a hotel, there will be 24 hour deliveries (which I'm sure the close neighbors will love - never mind the ages of construction it would all take), and loading docks blocking traffic on Electric, an already extra-narrow thoroughfare. Caskey spoke eloquently about how when she moved here 18 years ago ("and still consider myself a newbie"), she loved that she could ride bikes down the boulevard to the beach, but she would never dream of taking her young boys down the street on bikes now, with all the traffic and oblivious tourists ALREADY here, and this will only make it way worse. "The tourist money doesn't stay here, and it will only detract from the Venice we love ... Expect to hear from us." Word.

Parking was another biggie, and almost all mentioned it. Where are all the employees going to park? Where will the people go to park that don't want to pay high hotel parking prices? Into the neighborhoods, that's where. It's already difficult for people who live adjacent to AKB to find parking anywhere near their homes, and this will, of course, only exacerbate the problem. Steve and many more mentioned that they already avoid the street at all costs, which is sad when you figure it is there for US first. Or should be.

The open letter from the owners said that Venice "needs" a hotel. One prepared speaker named Lisa did some quick research before she came and told us that there are 35 (!) hotels in a 2 mile radius, so yeah, we don't need it. One guy whose name I missed said, "This is a NOT in my backyard situation. This is our

village, and this project will fundamentally shift the vibe of our town. No." Another guy said, "You walk down Abbot Kinney and you think, 'I wish I had a cup of coffee.' No one says, 'I wish I had a hotel.' This project is pure arrogance." Yep.

Danny was recently in Amsterdam, and was impressed at how developers there built things to conform to the historical nature of the area, which these guys should emulate. "Venice is in crisis now, this is a wonderful area that we want to preserve." Amen.

Logan said "We do NOT want this place to turn into the 3rd Street Promenade," which was echoed by David. Angelo said that if the hotel people were FOR community, they would never have even THOUGHT about putting a hotel there, and that he saw "No way to solve these problems in that location." Kim said she was opposed to a hotel that would cater to the wealthy. "Everything coming in is high end. I own two stores on Abbot Kinney (the lovely and reasonably priced Ananda and Skylark - proudly NOT corporate chain stores) and I can't afford to buy a house here. All my employees walk to work, but they're finding it hard to afford to even rent an apartment here anymore." That isn't right. That isn't Venice.

Marta asked for a show of hands opposing the hotel, and almost every hand went up. She said, "We, as Venetians, get to choose the character of our community!" and felt that the hotel group were making their "concessions" because of the pressure they're getting, not because it's what's right to do. She then plunked down over 100 letters of opposition in front of the committee for good measure. Bam!

There were maybe three or four people who spoke that were for the project, and at least two of them felt like total plants. One was so gushy about it, you'd think a Nobel Prize was next for people who want to put up a boxy, fancy hotel in a surf, skate, art neighborhood. She said, "I'm 100% in favor of this, and we don't need to hear another 'No' tonight," to which the entire place drowned out anything else she said after in a chorus of "NOOOOOOs!" It was kind of great, a very power to the people moment. Both Abrams and Kaufman said at different points in the

evening, "Not to sound sarcastic (which it did) but if you don't like it, tell your neighbors not to sell." True enough (DON'T SELL!!!), but it came off as a screw you.

When all had spoken, the hotel team had a chance to respond. That was the "Then don't sell" time, and Abrams said he had bought the property before someone else - that didn't care as much - came in to build BIG without any regard for the community, and if they didn't get to build their hotel, they'd sell to someone who would. To that, someone radly yelled, "Don't threaten us!" More claps. When Abrams said, "We want to do something in the context and reality of Venice's future," that got maybe two claps. They ended with "We're listening and we hear you and we want to work with you, thank you." That might be true, but in demeanor and tone, it felt like some pandering to get what you want.

At the end, one guy said, "Look us in the eye and say you're going to do the right thing. Honor this exceptional community." Another lady said, "This project is NOT inevitable. We care. We fight. We are active activists. This is NOT a given, and CAN be stopped!" That got big applause, in solidarity.

And it can be stopped. As someone said, "Nowhere else do you see a community coming together like this. This is Venice, and our community is authentic." We all milled around in the lobby after the hotel part of the meeting was done and discussed it all. No one likes that it seems to be a matter of "Old, crazy Venice" vs. "Nouveau riche Venice," because time and money spent do not make the spirit of a place. A thoughtful population - from 50 years to 50 days living here - that honors the past, respects its beautiful diversity of residents in all income brackets (including none), and looks forward in a cool, conscientious manner is what makes a place great. We still have that, and we WILL fight for it. There will be more meetings, debate and votes about this, and we will be there. Defend Venice!

*You can learn more for yourself at AbbotKinneyHotel.com and at <http://www.venicenc.org/committees/lupc>

Below: full house at the October 2 LUPC meeting at Oakwood Rec. as people came out to speak against



Pondering the Difference: Thought vs. Meditation

By Francie Wong

Some people say that they meditate while doing dishes or walking down the street just enjoying being outside and in touch with their breath. I used to do dishes and chant the mantra, "I am grateful". I remember standing at the sink full of dishes, tears running down my face while saying it over and over again. In my opinion, I was not meditating when I was washing the dishes; I was, however, saying an affirmation while doing an activity that I normally would not enjoy doing and by saying it over and over, it prevented otherwise negative thoughts to pervade my mind. I no longer cry over a sink full of dishes and I get to choose whether I want to be lost in thought, repeat a mantra like "I am grateful" or just do the dishes.

Pretend for a moment that we all have our own seed within us. Anything like a thought, emotion or feeling is not the seed; it is outside of that seed. Meditation is taking time to calm your body and your mind enough to begin watering that seed little by little. As you water the seed, the distance between where the seed ends and where the other begins (thoughts, feelings and emotions) grows. This only comes through stillness.

I would like you to imagine you are watching a drive-in movie. You are sitting in your car and you

are watching the large screen with all of the pictures. There is a speaker that you have attached to the door of your car so you can hear the sound, or you can turn the sound down. The pictures and the sounds are your thoughts. When one meditates, the thoughts will not necessarily stop, however. The more you water the seed within you through meditation, the more awareness and choice you have. It is like creating space between the thoughts and your inner-most being.

If you look at emotions and feelings, almost all emotions and feelings can be traced back to a thought that came into your mind or your consciousness. It used to be that I would lie in bed before getting up and already feel completely stressed out before even brushing my teeth. This is because while I was lying there, I was thinking about everything I had to get done, all the unfinished projects, the house and the state of my marriage. All of these thoughts would come through, I would attach to a lot of them. The attachments created emotions and feelings, which in turn created a lot of stress in my body. And I would have barely put my feet into my slippers. If I had to take a wager, I would bet that many people experience this same kind of thing.

Thought is energy. If you think good thoughts, you feel good; you walk through your day with more ease. If you are thinking negative thoughts, then your day is more difficult, there is more stress in your body

and it perpetuates itself. Wouldn't it be great to be able to choose? How does one get to choose whether they will think any thoughts at all, positive or negative? It is through meditation that one gains the muscle to get to choose; positive thoughts, negative thoughts or just being.

My first experience with meditation was in high school, as with many journeys, my road wove in and out of that path as I searched for quality teachers. For me, they were not always easy to find. The funny thing about teachers, is that they are all human. One must decide for themselves whether or not what is being said feels true to them or not.

For the past 7 years, I have deepened my own practice and am now sharing what I have learned and continue to discover with others. For more information on my personal story that includes surviving cancer, please visit my website. I would be more than happy to answer any questions that you have to help you on your way.

<http://www.calmmonkey.com>
[facebook.com/calmmonkey](https://www.facebook.com/calmmonkey)

Calm Monkey is a portal for tips and tools on meditation as well as spoken word creative visualizations recorded to help people, especially children drift into sleep.

Why is there always one?

By Ronald McKinley

Why is there always one to bomb?
To fight
Why is there always more than one to die?
Is there always more
Why is it so
More a want
Than a need
American warlords showing their stones
American warriors returning home broken
Why always do we return to this point?
Should we bomb people to save them?
Why are we quick to bomb?
Why are new weapons tested?
Why do they look like toys I played with as a boy?
Why is there always one waiting?
For the next set of boys

BOOTS ON THE GROUND: or Talk of War

(September Song)
By D.J. Carlile

Will they put some boots down,
boots on the ground?
Say these are empty boots,
with nothing in them,
empty boots with ghostly feet
and spectral toes, the memories
of missing bodies---
dead or legless or worse.
Boots on the ground,
their owners in a bag now
or a box of ashes or a hearse,
in a bed or on wheels,
on crutches, locked out, or in reverse,
locked in.
Some boots on the ground,
all empty, all marching.
These were your children,
these are and aren't your kids.
Why put a foot there?
Death in fancy footwear
wants to buckle a shoe,
one-two, wants you, one too.
That existential dilemma
of what is true, what false
has always boots one size fits all.

11:11 Monday, September 16th, 2013, Adullam My life stares back at me this Monday morn. I wonder why that ever was I born. The sky outside my window marks the mood Within the room; throughout the neighborhood. The barre storm fence bears it's nakedness In shame, wishing it could simply dress In green velour it wore one week ago, Before that idiot savaged it so. The oscillating fan, soft to confess In circulations, windy to express. And I, for one, beginning to feel good; That is to say, I don't feel quite so bad. New page is written, soon as one is torn. As I stare at my life, I am reborn Roger Houston, given the name "Adullam" by the Children of God, 1971.



Richard Modiano reciting a poem on the Poetry Stage at the Abbot Kinney Festival
Photo : Greta Cobar

Sunday Night

Ivy-Elena, sitting on a cushion on the couch
tells her story to Mark:
Once upon a time there was a daddy named Mark,
a mommy named Sue-Sue,
a daughter named Ivy and a son named Xavier.
They got up in the morning and had waffles
and whipped cream and ate it all up.
They went outside and saw a mango tree, with a
blossom that was flame-colored and very beautiful.
The end. Then she said: do you have a
needle? So I could sew this book up?
Mark said not right now but I can get you
one in the morning.
They looked at each other with love and exhaustion
Sue-Sue came out and they told the story to her.
They were all together on the couch, really
tired and the kids were jumping around.
Xavier pretending to be Spider Man, climbing the walls.
I got to watch a family being a family.
I sat in the chair holding their cat, reading
The New York Times Magazine.
I got to see how good it gets at home, their home.
how it can work without a lot of yelling and screaming
how it looks when they let kids be themselves,
express themselves.
Xavier likes to be Spider Man and climb the walls
Ivy likes to draw on paper and call it her book
someday she will learn to read and write in English
but for now it's scribbling and memorizing her stories
It was a rare moment of down time
in a family that is constantly moving.
And I sit back and drink it in.
The End - I mean, The Beginning
– Mary Getlein

Time Is True, But Still

Frequently as I view my surroundings
I feel I've missed much that life has
But, still I like what I've seen and done
There is a certain contentment in that, at least
The North garden wall is covered in green
Moss, kept moist by no sun
The pine tree nettles drop continually making
A soft bed when nap is near
A dog's bark is heard in the distance
Answered by other barks more closer
The figure on the road, slowly trekking,
Head bent low, hat pulled down, coat pulled
Tight with hands in gloves
It makes you think of old Harvey Joe
Long done now and better though
I wonder how dry the Summer will be, since
I've planted the field a week ago
The distant mountains blue with haze
Bring sweet memories of my days
When I did walk then hand-n-hand
A loved one I still can see traveling
On our merry way.

Should I admit to this?
– James Stone

Ode to Autumn

A sonnet
By Michael Riley

Yes, my friend, it’s sadly true
I have contacted Vernal Flu
The melancholy that sets in
when winter’s chilly rains begin
and Ursa Major, from her crest
starts slowly slipping to the west.
I soon shall see the old drunk guy
residing in the Winter sky.
O’Ryan – the Irish constellation
holds high a flagon of libation
while ‘tis no sheath upon his belt
just the open fly unfelt.
Through winter’s reign – cold and muddy
he shall be my drinkin’ buddy.

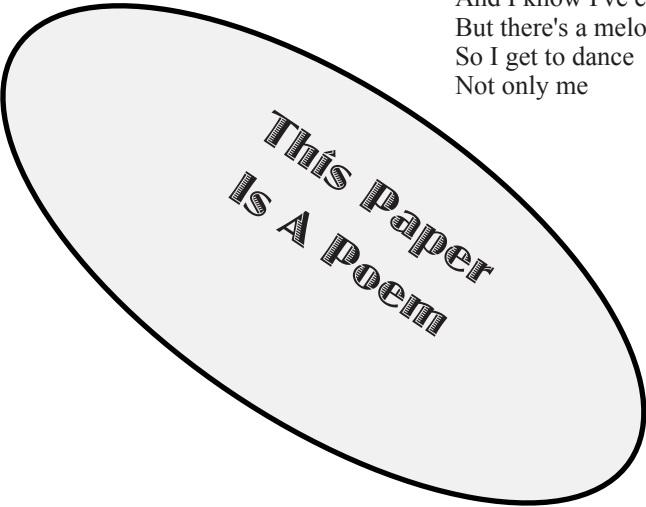
The Blood

By Humberto Gómez Sequeira-HuGóS
For Alma Ivette Durán

Every day the blood
of consciousness
irrigates the electric root
of the cells that produce
the formulas of my thoughts
of toys
and wild desires.
Without coagulating
in the cold atmosphere
of my emptiness,
it follows the course
of loyalty to its human instinct
of sacrifice
and vengeance.

Only Me

By Emily Wood
I watch my chest rise and fall
And wonder how I got here
And how I move in this skin
Do I belong here?
In this vessel of sin
A moving mistake
Contained within
Punished, ashamed
Hidden away
To save you
It's what I've always done
Never hurt anyone
Only me
Only me
But I feel the blood
And the air
And the warmth
And a tear
And I know I've earned nothing
But there's a melody here
So I get to dance
Not only me



Mark Your Calendar and Save the Date!

Beachhead’s 45th
Birthday Celebration

December 1, 6:30pm, Beyond Baroque

Music, Poetry, Drinks and Fun!

— Continued from page 1: Using Art in the Struggle for Social Justice

the old posters are stored. They would give me dozens and sometimes hundreds of posters.

The Center started out under the bed and in the halls of my apartment in Venice. I put together exhibits on Women, Liberation Theology, and with Ed Pearl, our neighbor, I put together an "Art Against Apartheid" exhibit. People started asking me if I could put together exhibits on this or that, so I started putting together exhibits to order. At that time it was all volunteer, it was a labor of love. It still is, but now I have staff to pay. I had amassed by this time somewhere between 3000 and 5000 posters, and I realized that these were a commitment and a responsibility to people's history. The Library of Congress was interested in the Nicaraguan Exhibit, but they would just archive them and nobody would ever see them.

I realized that there was no existing organization in the country that was using these posters for educational consciousness raising. My friends told me to start my own. We got a pro-bona attorney to draw up our Articles of Incorporation as a non-profit 501c3 organization in 1989.

Beachhead: What are you working on right now?

Carol Wells: We are doing a 60-poster exhibit as our first collaboration with the American Friends Service Committee, and it's also a traveling exhibition using all digital reproductions. This exhibit is called "Boycott: The Art of Economic Activism" and it is on its way to Washington, D.C. It covers about 20 boycotts over 60 years, such as the Coors Boycott, the South Africa Boycott, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. It shows how boycotts are non-violent direct actions that in many cases achieved a lot of success. They can bring attention in a non-violent way, to injustices in worker rights, to persecution. It is also an educational tool to make people realize that every dollar they spend is supporting or opposing something. Whether it's a brand and the policies that brand stands for. Like coffee, you can support the independent coffee shops, or you can support the megabrands.

Beachhead: Do they give you money for the exhibitions?

Carol Wells: Yes, we rent the exhibitions to galleries all over the world, but primarily in the United States. Here we have the catalog for the "Prison Nation Show". It includes all the information about the movement and the history of the 75 posters included in this exhibit. The program includes posters that people can put right up on their wall. It also has a list of resources for Prison Rights issues. When we reprint posters, and when we make digital reproductions for exhibition, we have to get permission from the artist,

if we can find them. We do not need to ask permission to exhibit original prints, which we own. Most people are just absolutely thrilled when we reproduce their posters because these things were intended to be multiplied, reproduced and widely disseminated.

Our exhibits have gone to over 300 venues, and we loan posters to museums all over the world to augment their exhibitions. We were in 15% of the "Pacific Standard Time" shows. Our posters have been in MOCA, the Hammer, and the African American Museum.

Beachhead: Do you also collect political buttons?

Carol Wells: Yes, we have thousands. We recently received a donation of a huge collection of buttons from Lenny Potash, a union organizer, and he also donated glass cases to display them. We have a very small staff, but we are 30% larger because of a Federal Grant that we received for a very specific project.

Beachhead: What can Beachhead readers do to support the CSPG?

Carol Wells: We can use volunteers to help us document and organize the art donations we receive. Donations are always welcome too. This year's annual fundraiser will take place October 20 (see below). For more info, call 310-397-3100 or visit www.politicalgraphics.org.



At CSPG, L to R: Nicole Trejo, Intern; Carol Wells, Founder and Executive Director; Elvia Arroyo-Ramirez, Project Archivist
Photo: Eric Ahlberg



Venice Library: Operation Black, "Black Is Beautiful," 1968. Credit: Center for the Study of Political Graphics.

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Cheri Gaulke & Sue Maberry met at the Woman's Building, a feminist art center, in 1976. Their work combines art, activism and education. In 1981, they co-founded the anti-nuclear performance group Sisters Of Survival. Cheri is Head of the Visual Arts at Harvard-Westlake School and Sue is Director of the Library at Otis College of Art and Design.

Get Lit Players are an award-winning classic and spoken word teen poetry troupe comprised of teenagers from throughout Los Angeles County. The Get Lit Players perform for over 10,000 of their peers each year, inspiring them to read, write and participate in the arts and be leaders in their communities.

Sonia Mercado & Sam Paz are activist civil rights attorneys with a long and successful history challenging police misconduct and supporting the constitutional rights of prisoners. Their work supporting the rights of the incarcerated to medical care, to be free from violence and brutality and to end illegal police spying against community and political organizations have led to important reforms.

On Being Homeless in Venice...

By Brian Connolly

I’ve been supporting the rights of the un-housed as a political activist who dresses like John Lennon, pitching my tent overnight at different events, and then going back to my apartment. I’d made some mistakes in my life recently, though, and found myself un-housed. This is what it’s been like:

I ran up the sidewalk towards the St. Joseph homeless shelter in Venice, California. It was 6:45am – too late for orientation. Though the cops had awoken me with a beeping sound right out of “Star Wars” right before 6:00am, the cut-off for still sleeping on the sidewalk in LA, I was late. I had a copy of *Treasure Island* in my hand and a pack on my back. The book, of course, is filled with characters such as Captain Long John Silver, ruthless pirates and castaways such as Ben Gunn. St. Josephs is filled with castaways also: drug addicts, the mentally ill, the victims of violence and other traumas, and also poor souls who wouldn’t hurt a fly, who simply made a mistake or two. When the bankers took the TARP money and rewarded themselves for the crises that they’d created, they marginalized almost everyone in society, but here were the people towards the bottom. No bailouts here.

On the line in front of me was Gypsy — an old man with a palm tree tattoo on his cheek, almost like a pirate. He laid on the cement in front of me, his lips pursing in as if over false teeth, faded tattoos splotched across his arms. His right eye is a translucent white. In this world, the first thing you begin to learn is what you need to know in your first hour in prison. Not to make unnecessary eye contact with certain people. Large muscular aggressives will go off on you in a threatening way over little things. Over time you realize that it’s just their way of fronting, of protecting themselves. Just don’t press that trigger and they’ll ignore you. It’s other creatures in what I’ve come to call "The Underworld" whom you have to worry about much more.

The “shop talk” in a line before a homeless shelter is filled with subjects like the food stamp benefit going down \$11 next month. How “The Shawshank Redemption” is a bunch of bullshit; it’s hard to kill yourself, especially by hanging. Del Taco just announced it’ll have \$0.50 cent tacos all next month. After getting my name on a list and waiting for another hour to be called up to a computer, I headed over to Bread and Roses, the shelter’s feeding location, to eat. On the way there, on a corner in the slanting sun by the ’76 gas station was Gypsy with a cardboard sign, begging for change. He glanced up as I passed pushing my bike. His hand reached up and grabbed my wrist suddenly. Through slurred words he looked up through his translucent eye and cried out to me “I’m gonna kill myself. This life ain’t worth living. I got nothing to go on about!” It wasn’t melodrama. Sprawled across the curb before Whole Foods, I knew that he meant it, at least in his soul somewhere. I don’t remember what I said, but it was probably something weak like, “Hang in there.” I wheeled my bike forward, his grip giving way like a rope slipping from a wooden ship. I stopped after a few paces, remembering that I’d bought a three-part string cheese package from the \$0.99 store. Remembering that the castaway in the book, Ben Gunn, only really missed cheese, I asked him if he wanted any. He said yes and took the cheese with a distant, but appreciative “Thank you.”

At night, I sleep under the stars by Gold’s Gym in Venice – and I’m not alone. There’s a scattering of different human beings, in sleeping bags, under patio umbrellas, some tents...few tents...it’s not the cops who care. It’s the other homeless people who believe that it’d be "putting on airs" who are the deterrent apparently. I use cardboard to cover my sleeping bag and to reduce the wetness of the dew in the morning. Also, it acts as camouflage—nothing of value under here... And protection -- one night someone threw hard bread at us from a speeding car, shouting taunts against the homeless. There’s this guy on a blue bike with a distinct metallic squeak who cruises through the sleeping bodies on the sidewalk late at night, looking for anything to steal from us...cigarettes, shoes. An Occupier comrade of mine, Alex, caught him staring at a dog called Daisy, who accompanied us one night. She never barked, unaware that she might have had a new, possibly cruel, owner.

On another night, a thief crept up to me as I slept, reached over me silently and lifted my bike. I woke a moment later and saw that my bike was gone. Panic. Rise. Reality or dream? I charged down the street to where the thief was trying to put my Cannondale into a 30k SUV. I thundered at him, “That’s my bike, you motherfucker!” Viciously, wide-eyed, unswervingly. Screams in Spanish from the driver later translated to me as "Give it to him! Just give it to him!" The thief panicked and threw my bike back at me as a weapon, cutting my wrist in two spots. They sped away. The

other un-housed figures near me still in their spots looked up sheepishly, but aware. As the swift ebb of violence passed, I apologized for waking them in a calm voice. Mutters of “Preying on the homeless,” etc., passed from person-to-person down the line of dark figures against a large green hedge.

Every night, no matter where I am in the city, I “migrate” back to the exact same spot. My head lines up to where the parking sign pole starts. To my right, a kid named Mickey has his spot, there every night for ten months since leaving Washington state. To my left, a huge fellow with a bald head who’ll kick anyone he finds in his spot to any other place on earth, no matter the time of night. That’s his spot. I began to understand why I always heard about violence erupting over spots on the sidewalk. It’s the only kind of psychological congruency left to someone who has no other physical spot to call his home.

And through all this, there are unmistakable acts of kindness. There is this rich blonde woman and a well-dressed brown-haired man in fine clothes who’ll jump out of their limo with cookies, one time with a beef stroganoff dish. There are young 20-somethings who call themselves The Burrito Project, who will lay hot bean and rice burritos and Mountain Spring water bottles by sleeping figures on the concrete. Baptist churches, the Hari Krishnas, Catholic Charities, and all sorts of volunteers in the shelters who seem to change every day, but who are still there every day. At Bread and Roses I was stunned at the quality of the food. I learned that the chef had just gone on “Chopped”—and won! He could make many times the money working at a fancy restaurant with his skills, but he doesn’t seemingly give a hoot. He shows up at Bread and Roses every day and cooks for us instead.

After eating, I circled back to St. Josephs. A piece of paper told me that they handed out free clothes at that time. There was Gypsy, staring out into the traffic of Lincoln Boulevard. I handed him some more cheese. Suddenly, right before the shelter door, an LAPD car pulled up. A cop got out and said to someone in the back seat, “This is it. In there.” A girl got out of the squad car, barefoot and covered in a grey blanket. It was the cops dropping someone off at a homeless shelter. An infamous homeless drop-off that the cops claim never really happen. When the girl got out, the cops sped away, not checking whether or not she’d entered. I walked up to her pushing my bike. I said, “The shelter is in there.” What I met when I came face-to-face with her was a shattered human being. She didn’t respond verbally. Her eyes were dilated as if from a permanent shock. She couldn’t have been more than in her late twenties. Her hair was very, very short, dark, but I could swear also grey. Severe mental illness? Schizophrenia? She wandered back and forth on the sidewalk a bit, oblivious to the case workers on the other side of the door the cops had pointed to, and Gypsy staring up through his one good eye, silent but ever present, peeling the string cheese strand-by-strand.

Intuiting that she wouldn’t answer me, I wheeled my bike to the back of St. Joseph’s. There was Russell, the new guard and very approachable. Did they want me to get involved? To mind my own business? I was “in their charge” to an extent. Did this happen every day? If this was a movie, this is the part where I would’ve charged in there and saved the day, connecting the downtrodden with the angels just an arm’s length from them. But this was real life and all this, though embellished a bit, really happened.



Nancy Donald; Mike Sheets (photographer); Christine Wilson, “Homelessness is America’s Disgrace,” 1996. Credit: Center for the Study of Political Graphics

What I actually did after a moment was just wheel my bike down the alley, disappearing myself back into the underworld.

At the Santa Monica library, I entered with my pack to write all this down, only to be ejected by a guard. My pack had a sleeping bag and a sleeping mat — both illegal in the library — to keep out the homeless. They even put in a new \$25 for a library card for non-residents rule in case that didn’t work. On the way back, I eat at OPCC. The guards were speaking amongst themselves in hushed whispers. Someone had been stabbed the day before, blood everywhere, but that’s not what had them freaked out. It was "who" got stabbed, someone known to them as the nicest, calmest guy out there who wouldn’t antagonize anyone; the unnerving fact being that no one, even themselves, was immune to the sudden inflammation of violence that would catch like a spark and erupt like a flame.

Out of sight, out of mind. From the 1% down, society doesn’t want to see the homeless, even acknowledge that their own actions — or in-actions — could be part of the problem of the un-housed. OPCC, the Santa Monica shelter is located on a street only visible from the 10 Freeway if you’re looking to the right at an exact moment before reaching the beach. After I let other Occupy activists know my situation, they very kindly tried to help me, offering a place to shower, food, something to drink, but honestly these gestures aren’t as helpful as you’d think. All those things are easy to acquire if you’re resourceful in a place like Venice or Santa Monica. It’s the psychological chains that the homeless need help with: substance abuse, the lack of information and motivation to solve problems like how to find a job, and how to find a housing situation. Empowerment. This is how it’s done. Here’s the solution. You need an email address and a cellphone just to have one. Facts a caring mother or father tells their children over and over.

In the meantime, cheese may sustain...and acts of kindness. I’m still homeless. I’ll sleep under the stars in the same spot tonight listening to an electrical transponder on top of a telephone pole spark and sputter in the moist beach air. Tomorrow I’ll go to the shelter, eat at Bread and Roses...maybe have an extra package of string cheese if Gypsy is still "on board." I never saw the girl with dilated eyes again, though those shattered eyes haunted my dreams last night as I tossed and turned in my cardboard-covered sleeping bag.

Maybe tomorrow. Occupy!

Abbot Kinney Festival

2013



Photos 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 – by John Decindis; Photo 6: Greta Cobar – by Eric Ahlberg; Photo 7: Earl Newman at the Beachhead booth – by Greta Cobar; Photo 8: Dancing in the Street – by Suzanne Thompson; Photo 9: Pano Douvos and Angelo Douvos at the Peace and Freedom Party booth – by Greta Cobar