



## **Venice Art Walls Pilot Program**

Report on Program after six months (June 3, 2007 – November 2007)

**Submitted to: Venice Art Walls Advisory Board**

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### **Thank You to Program Contributors**

I would like to start by saying thank you to all the people that have contributed time, effort and resources to the Pilot Program this year with special thanks to all the members of the Advisory Board. ICU Art, the artists that paint in the area, the residents and businesses of Venice and the people of the entire region have benefited from this group effort. I believe all of these groups do appreciate your efforts.

### **Venice Art Walls Current Situation:**

The area is currently curated by ICU Art as part of a six-month pilot program. The Department of Recreation & Parks granted to ICU Art a Right of Entry Permit (ROE) to operate this program from June 2007 until the end of November 2007. That ROE was extended for an additional six months – through May 26, 2008.

### **History of the Site**

The Venice Pavilion, which was built in the 1960's, included an outdoor amphitheater that eventually became known as the Graffiti Pit in the early 1980's. When the Ocean Front Walk Refurbishment was being planned in 1999 the California Coastal Commission (CCC) ordered that the walls be preserved as a pre-condition to the Venice Pavilion being torn down. The CCC recognized that area was an important art resource for disadvantaged youths and an area of cultural historic significance. It was ruled that the walls should be preserved as a memorial to the high quality graffiti that had been practiced at the site for over thirty years. The CCC required that a program be installed to manage the site. ICU Art was asked to curate the walls by the Department of Recreation & Parks, the Cultural Affairs Department, and the City Council Office under Ruth Galanter.

### **Original ICU Art Curation Program: 2000 to June 2007**

ICU Art curated the walls under this informal program that was originally authorized in 2000 with a Right of Entry Permit from the Department of Recreation & Parks. From 2000 until June 2007 the program was entirely funded by ICU Art with no financial support from the City of LA.

### **Problems for the Area: 2004-2006**

Eventually the volume of painters working at the site at all hours of the day lead to a range of negative impacts on the surrounding area. Local residents and business owners complained about the increases in area vandalism. The current program was developed as an attempt to keep the walls as an art

resource for the community, while mitigating the negative impacts on the community. The program does seem to be a success as rated by many different aspects of the Venice community.

### **Program Advisory Board**

The Program is overseen by the Department of Recreation and Parks. The program is advised by the Pilot Program Advisory Board which is made up of members of GRVNC, RAP, LAPD, The City Attorney's Office and the Neighborhood Prosecutor's Office, the GRVNC Graffiti Committee, employees of the Office of Neighborhood Beautification, local residents, business owners and members of the Venice Arts Council. The Advisory Board is chaired by Mike Bonin, Chief of Staff for Bill Rosendahl, Councilmember for City Council District 11.

### **Summary of the Pilot Program**

After nearly one year of negotiating and community evaluation and input the program began on June 3, 2007 with a live painting kick-off event. This event was attended by approximately 400 to 500 people over the course of day. Over 50 artists signed up to paint the walls that day. The area was painted with high quality art by well-respected artists from all over Los Angeles. The event was a success at getting the word out about the program and kicking off the program on a positive note. The event generated a large amount of publicity with articles about the event appearing on several TV news programs, in articles in the LA Times, the Argonaut and several other local and national newspapers and magazines. The event was featured prominently on the home page for Yahoo!. Viral coverage of the event surfaced on numerous U-Tube, Myspace pages as well as a feature on Current TV.

### **Initial LAPD Resources and Support**

During the first two months of the program we found that local artists were aware of the new rules even if they did not always follow them. The police were initially not clear on the proper procedures for enforcing the new rules. Initially we had almost no enforcement of the new rules by the LAPD. After two presentations to the LAPD Pacific Division done in conjunction with the Neighborhood Prosecutor's office and the City attorney, the LAPD enforcement began to have a greater and more noticeable effect. During the summer when the LAPD had additional personnel more available to patrol the area, we saw a decrease in the frequency of people painting outside of the permit system. After Labor Day we have had a significantly reduced LAPD presence during the day and a greatly reduced presence during the longer nighttime hours. This has resulted in a gradual upswing in the amount of nighttime painting in the area. We believe the majority of the people painting during these times are minors, who are being turned away during the daytime weekends.

### **Quality of the Artwork**

The quality of the artwork on the walls has been slowly rising. Larger more conceptual pieces, in full color have been painted on the large walls on Saturdays and Sundays. The quality has gone up as artists understand their piece will stay up longer than it would have in the near past. We have not insisted that people paint the entire wall with three people teams as we had originally planned. We have been allowing solo artists to paint on the large wall, as long as they have a sketch. We direct them to a section of the wall that is tagged up already. The goal is that by the end of the day on Saturday and Sunday, that all the walls are covered with nice pieces. People can still do improvisational art without a sketch on the cone structures with the small walls, trashcans and the tabletops. In general, artists tell us that with time, more and more quality artists will come and paint as they find out that the pieces will stay up and not be tagged over so quickly.

### **Outreach**

People are aware of the Program. The outreach has been effective. We continue to get media exposure through print and some TV. TV Exposure has been through things like U Tube, and Current TV. The graffiti artist community gets info on the walls from various web sites and blogs on the subject. Out-of-towners still come to the walls unaware of the new program. ICU Art staffed a table at the Mar Vista Gardens Night Out to publicize the program and rules to the community. ICU art shared a booth at the Abbott Kinney Street Fair with the

Venice Arts Council and Beyond Baroque. At both events we had a large canvas with graffiti art, photos and printed information on the program. ICU art has regularly attended meetings of the Venice Arts Council and has made one mid-program report to the Grass Roots Venice Neighborhood Council. ICU Art made two separate presentations to the Pacific Division officers about the program.

### **Vandalism Reduction**

The amount of vandalism in the area has gone down significantly since the inception of the program. These results are due to combination of factors. Some of the factors that have decreased the amount of vandalism in the area that are not technically part of the Pilot Program include: increased community diligence, awareness and personal vandalism removal and reporting by area residents and businesses, coordinated efforts by the Graffiti Committee of the GRVNC, increased vandalism removal by Pacific Graffiti Solutions, increased enforcement abilities of the LAPD. Specifically we can tell that the trees in the area and objects on Rec. and Park property need to be painted over much less. Area residents that report to the Advisory Board meeting are happy with the vandalism reduction. In general there are far fewer people bringing paint into the area and far fewer people doing illegal vandalism in the area. The area on-site supervisors have established a relationship with the artists that do come to paint in the walls, and these people seem to feel they have a stake in keeping the area clean. I don't believe there has been any significant increase in the amount of vandalism on area murals since the program began. Bill Manco, representative of the Grass Roots Venice Neighborhood Council on our Advisory Board, has reported that the area residents have reported as much as an 80% drop in illegal vandalism in the Venice Area since the program began from one year prior.

### **Maintenance of the Area in General**

The area received a large receptacle from Recreation and Parks for used spray can in the area. It is great. We can store items for the program in the trash receptacle as well as the used spray cans. We need new signs that can resist tagging for the area. We need funding for metal cutout signage that can be posted at the site with information on the program.

We are currently requesting permission to re-install the two-sided painted banner that states "Painting by Permit Only, Violators will be prosecuted. [www.veniceartwalls.com](http://www.veniceartwalls.com)."

The signs installed by the city in the area have been tagged up since the day they were installed and have been cleaned maybe once or twice at most. They are not the proper type of signs for the area and cannot be properly maintained.

The Graffiti Committee of the GRVNC began a program with community volunteers where they got permission from RAP to paint over surfaces on RAP property. We have noticed that this has helped to keep the area clean, but the program seems sporadic. We feel this has the potential to really help keep the area looking nice and to discourage would-be-taggers.

### **Artists**

Much fewer artists use the area now than before the pilot program in June of 2007. It is pretty slow in the mornings. Some people wait until we leave and mess up the walls at night. This is a major problem. Often by Tuesday most of the pieces from the weekend have been defaced. I think this is slowly improving. Since December of 2007, the nighttime vandalism has been reduced somewhat. Fewer people are at the beach during the cold winter months and shorter days.

## **People Painting During Non-Permitted Hours**

People painting on the walls at night and during the day on weekdays, continues to be the major problem for the area. It is very clear that a large number of people are able to paint on the walls on weekdays for extended periods of time with apparently no consequences. We know this because we monitor the area on weekdays and compare the pieces up on the walls with the pieces that we know were done with permits over the weekends.

We see pieces in full color that clearly took more than just 10 or 15 minutes to paint up on the walls. We have had reports from residents of groups of kids painting with rollers and bucket paint for the base coat. This takes awhile to dry at night, so clearly they are at the site painting for a long period of time unmolested. I have gotten reports from my contact within the graffiti arts community that people can expect to paint the walls in broad daylight on weekdays with fear of a ticket. This general perception is a major problem that undermines all of our work.

We also see that these vandals leave their cans as garbage in front of the walls rather than deposit it in them in the secured trash cans. The problem is then compounded by the Rec. and Park staff that picks up the cans, but does not deposit them in the secure trashcans. The next group of kids comes along and picks the used cans out of the trash and tags on the mural or tags in the area.

Although we appreciate the work of the RAP staff to clean and maintain the area, it is clear that more needs to be done. We have documented on numerous occasions where trash has been left in the cans for many days. Often times if the plastic trash bag blows away or is removed, people still dump trash in the cans. Instead of removing the trash from the unlined cans it just sits there for days. The trashcans originally were all chained up to trees, and now a large number of the cans are not chained up. This means they are more likely to be moved and tipped over or climbed or sat on by people in the area. The trash in the area needs to be completely empty every single day. The cans need to be thrown away in the secure trashcans only. The area should be clean by 10AM every day.

## **Minors**

We are losing all the minors that come to the area to paint. They are not painting with brush or rollers as we have suggested they do. We turn away a lot of minors all the time. This means they may be going out and doing the work illegally in the community and on the freeways. This is the group of people that we really need to target. Right now kids come down with their parents and want to paint, and we cannot let them. They get very upset. After we reviewed the CA state law on this issue, it seems like we could let them paint under certain guidelines. We think this is important. However we don't want to all of a sudden have a bunch of kids doing vandalism in the area again. In many cases it is the young ones who do most of the tagging. We have spoken with a few organizations in the area that might be interested in managing a mural workshop program for minors to paint with spray paint at the walls. Minors would need to have verifiable written permission from their parents or guardian to participate in the program. Winter or Spring would be a good time to test out a program of this sort. It should be a reward for the minors for good behavior. This program would need additional funding. This funding may be secured by the organization that could run the program.

In the mean time, I would suggest that minors be allowed to paint at the walls on one Saturday or Sunday a month under supervision by the current ICU art staff. Minors would need to get verifiable permission from their parents in writing. We need to be able to offer the minors

something at this point. Otherwise we are losing them. They are going away angry and frustrated. They are the ones that come back at night and in the morning and tag up the murals from the weekends. We cannot wait for a traditional non-profit funding cycle, since that would take one-year minimum.

### **Outreach to Minors Through the Schools**

We cannot really do outreach to the schools until we address this issue. It would just upset the kids if we were to go to schools now just to tell them that they can not use this art resource they way they want to. At this point we can only tell them that we have this great program, but if you are under 18, you basically cannot participate in it.

### **Filming and Special Event**

ICU art believes strongly that a percentage of funds earned by the City of LA for filming and special events in and around the area should go towards maintenance of the program.

### **Current Program Concludes May 26, 2008**

The program has been extended by 6 months by RAP. The current program is scheduled to be over at the end of May. The Advisory Board will help determine if the program is a success. ICU art can seek an additional extension of six months or one year from Recreation & Parks to continue the program.

### **Future Support for the Program Needed**

In order to not become a community nuisance, the walls need more active supervision and monitoring, not less. The program needs to reach out to minors using spray paint under a strictly supervised program with full parental support.

### **Benefits of the Program and Area for the Venice Community**

The walls are a legitimate cultural tourist draw, with people coming from all over the world to view and paint at the walls. The walls are a cultural and historic site that deserves to be preserved. The area serves as an economic engine for the community as the site is used regularly for commercial film, television and photography productions and other special events.

The area helps to maintain Venice as a center for art production and free expression. The area deters would-be-vandals by giving them a place to get their fame and practice their art form without risking their lives or destroying private or public property. By ICU Art managing the site on weekends, the LAPD and Recreation & Parks staff are free to do other work for the community.