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SPARC project hopes to solve graffiti pit's dilemma

BY LIZ FINCH

When the colorful walls of the Venice Pavilion's "graffiti pit" were mistakenly whitewashed by a maintenance crew in January, cries went up on both sides of the issue.

While many local residents felt it was a travesty to cover up the colorful artwork, others noted that since the majority of the "artwork" consisted of illegal tagging, it was good riddance to bad rubbish.

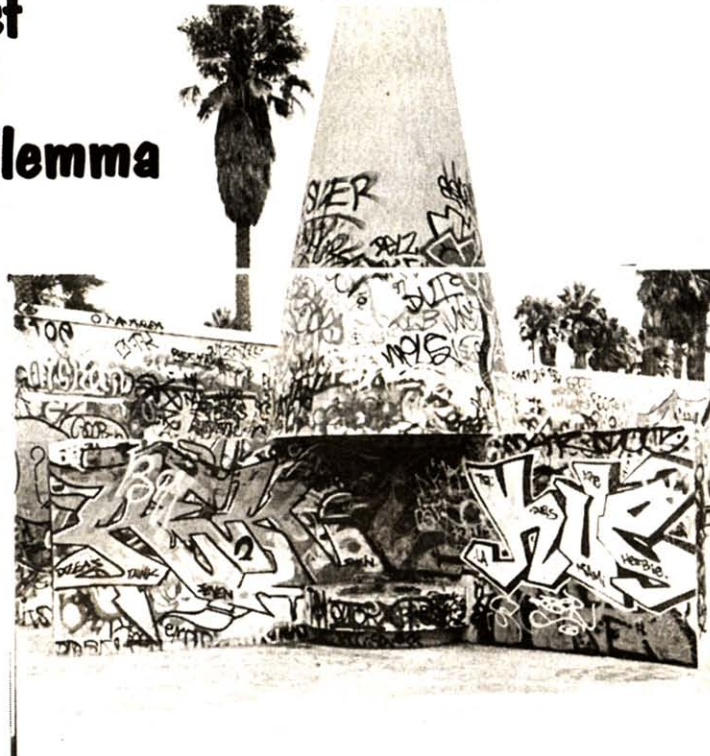
Now the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) has come up with a way it hopes can make both sides happy. This weekend, the walls of the graffiti pit (which have since been recovered with scrawls and doodles) will be whitewashed again — and then filled only with images pertaining to the theme *City of Angels — A Celebration of Venice*.

The repainting will be done by several young artists from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, August 16th.

The uproar over the white-out prompted Sixth District Councilwoman Ruth Galanter's office to contact SPARC to help facilitate a restoration, according to Sydney Kamlager, SPARC's community public art director.

"So we designed a project where we will bring in 15 crews of young professional artists to help restore the inner walls," says Kamlager, though she adds that since the walls are almost as graffiti-filled as they were before the pain-tout, Saturday's event is seen "less as a restoration at this point and much more as community outreach.

"Each crew will be designated a certain wall space on which they may paint



THE GRAFFITI PIT, as it looks now.

(Argonaut photo by Lupe Padilla)

images on themes including unity, peace, nonviolence, hip-hop culture, faith, safe sex, multiculturalism and the environment," she says.

All the artists involved in the painting had to attend four community meetings where project guidelines were discussed in great detail. Kamlager says community members also attended the meetings to show their support of the project.

In addition, Kamlager explains that the lead artists are "all well over the age of 21, and all have experience in paint-

ing with aerosol. They'll be supervising younger kids coming from the Venice area, the Westside, Ventura County and pretty much all over."

And all those younger artists have been made very aware of the restrictions of the project and the fact that only approved images in keeping with the themes will be allowed.

"This will definitely filter out any defensive or derogatory imagery," Kamlager says.

The team leaders were also asked to develop a coalition on graffiti awareness

to spread the word about what should not be done, and SPARC will produce a brochure on graffiti to be distributed to the public.

"We are not promoting or condoning tagging here, we're trying to promote aerosol art by creating mural images under a theme, a celebration of certain idea," Kamlager says. "Tagging, by contrast, is disrespecting public or private space. It's not about beautifying the environment; it's about vandalism, and it's something we hope to prevent from re-occurring through the community meetings we've had and the brochure we'll be distributing."

Kamlager adds that the public is welcome to come and hang out Saturday and watch, but she stresses that this is not a participation event.

"People can come down and lend their support, but they'll have to check it all out from a short distance away because of the spray aerosol being used."

And Kamlager says she hopes a lot of people will turn out.

"This is really an attempt to beautify our community," and to bring back the type of art that once graced the Pavilion walls before the graffiti took over," she says. "The Pavilion walls once held historic murals in the 1970s that celebrated living in Venice. We're just adding a contemporary twist to that idea."

■ *SPARC is a multiethnic arts center that produces, exhibits, distributes and preserves public art works. Since its founding in 1976 by muralist Judith F. Baca, painter Christina Schlesinger and filmmaker Donna Deitch, SPARC has involved hundreds of artists and community groups in the creation and presentation of public works of art.*

SPARC is at 685 Venice Blvd. in Venice.

Information, (310) 822-9560.