

ART



CLAYTON CAMPBELL 18th Street Arts Center

MIXED MEDIA: Rodrigo Marti and Felicia Montes worked with gang intervention program Homies Unidos to develop a poster and sticker campaign supporting the legal case of the program's director, Alex Sanchez.

AROUND THE GALLERIES

Art as a public effort

SHARON MIZOTA

The title of 18th Street Art Center's ambitious group exhibition, "**Love in a Cemetery**," comes from artist Allan Kaprow, who said, "Life in the museum is like making love in a cemetery." Kaprow attempted to escape the museum's sepulchral air with "happenings," open-ended, participatory events that blurred the line between art and everyday life.

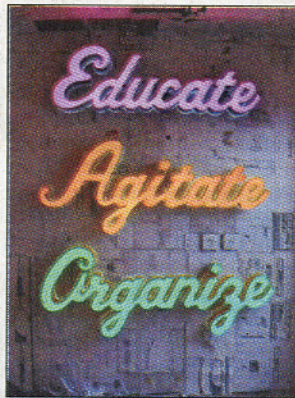
In this spirit, the exhibition presents works that take place within and outside the gallery, seeking to reevaluate the relationship between cultural institutions and the communities they serve. It succeeds, not so much in reinvigorating the gallery space, but in raising questions about how such works might best be presented within its walls.

Organized by curator Robert Sain and artist Andrea Bowers, the show is supposedly structured around a series of questions

on the relationship between "cultural institutions" and "community," both of which are ill-defined. People have scrawled various answers, ranging from glib to smart-alecky, in chalk on the walls of the gallery. Although broadly participatory, it's the least compelling part of the show.

The rest of the pieces were created by Bowers and eight graduate students from the Public Practice Program at the Otis College of Art & Design. The students, in pairs or individually, teamed with five community organizations to create projects that would both have a positive impact on their respective communities and produce a work to be shown in the gallery.

Rodrigo Marti and Felicia Montes worked with gang intervention program Homies Unidos to develop art workshops, a panel discussion, and a poster and sticker campaign supporting the legal case of the program's director, Alex Sanchez, who was indicted in a gang-related case in 2009. In the gallery, posters, fliers and protest signs line one of the walls and visitors can contribute to the cause by purchasing T-shirts, stickers and jewelry at a makeshift self-serve kiosk. The work successfully turns the gallery into an information and fundraising center, even if its traditional activist aesthetic — high contrast graphics, long columns of text and slapdash construc-



RONALD LOPEZ 18th Street Arts Center

LOW VOLTAGE: Andrea Bowers' "Educate, Agitate, Organize."

tion — loses some of its urgency on the gallery walls.

Less effective are the results of Rachael Filsinger and Ella Tetrault's project with My Friend's Place, a drop-in center for homeless youth in Hollywood. Filsinger and Tetrault ran workshops with the center's young clients, encouraging them to record all the places they had lived or visited on conventional printed maps. Mounted on sheets of plywood, some of the maps are annotated with expressions of frustration or political conviction, but the scrawled lines and dots are often so cryptic that one can't help feeling that the real work lies elsewhere. The maps are the byproduct of a process that hopefully has had some positive influence on its participants; it's too bad we don't know more about it.

Projects like these point to some of the difficulties of representing community-based work within the walls of the gallery. Should artists behave more like documentarians? Or should activism and art remain separate? On the other hand, is it enough to simply move the signs, T-shirts and stickers indoors?

Jamie Crooke's partnership with the Hollywood Sunset Free Clinic provides one possible answer: Crooke walked the streets around the clinic pushing a cart selling health-related items — bandages, apples, wheat grass seed, Emergen-C packets — in exchange for a dollar or a bit of conversation. In addition to examining the cart itself, gallery visitors can watch a video and flip through a photo book documenting the project. The cart also features a price list including the above mentioned items as well as the cost of one year of employer-provided health insurance (about \$13,000) and the annual compensation of United Health Group's CEO (more than \$9 million). With this sly, humorous gesture, the piece makes its critical point about inequities in healthcare spending, whether one sees it on the street or in the gallery.

It's impossible to ascertain whether Crooke's project had a greater impact than the rest; she simply presented it more thoughtfully. It is more than enough

[See Galleries, D15]

[**Galleries**, from D14]

to go out and help others or fight injustice, but communicating that accomplishment — giving one's vision a life beyond the immediate moment — is where the institution, whether a museum, an archive or, ahem, a newspaper, plays a role. Yes, the museum is often a mausoleum, housing the remnants of more vital activity, but how else will the rest of us know what happened?

18th Street Arts Center,
1639 18th St., Santa Monica,
(310) 453-3711, through
March 26. Closed Saturday
and Sunday. *www.18thstreet
.org*