



Artist introduces a bit of glitter to L.A.'s Skid Row

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By Dorothy Townsend

To the shouts of "now, now, now! Start shooting now!" from a man sitting cross-legged against a lamppost and sipping from a Coke can, the latest artwork of Sheila Elias was hoisted into place above San Pedro Street Tuesday-but not without a hitch or two.

It was not clear that the man on the sidewalk understood the theme of the piece or that it was dedicated to him and other habitues of the Skid Row area.

But he appeared to be getting a kick out of it. "Start shooting now before it breaks," he was shouting to the artist and a helper who were trying to secure one end of the unwieldy work inside of a fifth-floor window of an unoccupied city owned building.

The work, titled "Homage to the street people" is a string of eight huge (6 square feet) shopping bags splashed with black Xs and glitter dust. With considerable efforts and numerous near mishaps, Elias and friend were trying to get it strung across the 84-foot chasm of San Pedro Street between two buildings, No 443 and 444.

Twice they got it up and twice the rope holding it between the two structures broke. Within an hour, though, reinforced with wire, the work was raised with joyous yelp from the artist's crew. But the man on the street was gone by then. "I'm doing a homage to the street people," explained Elias, "The Xs are my symbol for the Pompidou Museum in Paris. I'm bringing the museum to street people."

Wearing a black T-shirt and back-billed cap, both splashed with white-painted Xs and glitter dust, Elias said the work is both joyous and somber. The empty building to which it is attached on one side is a sleeping place of the street people. Last week a man died huddled against a boarded-up entry aimed the green shards of a broken wine bottle. On Monday another man's body was found inside the stench-filled ruin. It was the final resting place of two men whose lives led them pointlessly there, and no further.

She chose the building, Elias said, because her fifth loft across the street looks directly into it. "I feel connected," she said. "What I want to say about it is, I love it." "You know their lives are so gray all the time, the streets they live in are gray, colorless. There's no glitter in their lives." She admitted that the big black Xs were funeral, "but the glitter (sprinkled on them) is to give them excitement."

She did not include color into the artwork because "there's no color in the streets. It's (color) too threatening." On the boarded entry where the man was found, "I left one black X with no glitter." The shopping bags, of course, are what street people carry their worldly belongings around in.

The building, she said, is earmarked as Rescue Mission Project Two by the Skid Row development planners. From her studio across the street, she could not help getting involved.