

Home for the Holidays

Gallery Looks at What Residency, or Lack Thereof, Means

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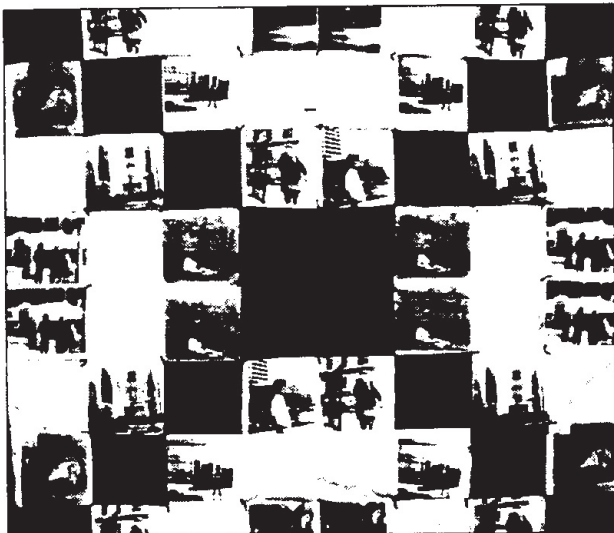
Come holiday time in art galleries, light-hearted group shows are the status quo. Artist Jennifer Rowland says she wanted to curate something grittier; the result, *Shelter: Coming Home*, runs through Dec. 28 at Highland Park's Avenue 50 Studio.

To build her exhibit, Rowland put out a call for artwork that responded to the idea of shelter, and in addition to

ART TALK

artists, she approached Downtown homeless shelters. "I didn't want to just do a homeless show. That's been done," Rowland says. "I wanted to talk about home in a different way, as that universal need for a place to go."

She received about 100 submissions from as far away as Romania and as close as Skid Row. She chose paintings, drawings, sculpture, assemblage, installation and quilts from



Victoria Taylor Alvarez's quilt commentary.

28 artists.

Three Skid Row works came her way via Lillian Abel, the program director for Project Hotel Alert, a senior dining center funded by the city's Department of Aging. Abel also holds art workshops at the James Wood Center. Manuel Compito contributed a charcoal drawing called "Man on the Sidewalk: Fifth Street between Crocker and Towne," and the late Joaquin Roebuck, an octogenarian Skid Rower, is represented with the painting "Church Bus." There is also an nameless cityscape by an unknown artist. "I don't know who painted it. I give them canvases and ask them to put their name on the back, but some of them are paranoid," Abel says.

Not Your Grandma's Quilts

If the artwork in *Shelter* isn't by homeless artists, it's often a statement on the homeless plight. Jennifer Murphy's assemblage piece "Blanket Fort" is comprised of fabrics taken from abandoned curbside couches. Crocheted into the quilt, instead of the usual "Home Sweet Home" type of adage, is a statistic attributed to this year's L.A. County Housing Authority report: "21,000 children are homeless every night in the city of L.A."

"Quilts are supposed to keep us warm and comfortable," gallery director Kathy Gallegos says. "But this one's about thrown away couches, thrown away people."

There is a mixed media piece in which artist Victoria Taylor Alvarez has positioned pictures of Skid Row residents onto a black and white checkerboard quilt. Looking at it is like watching a black and white film reel, which gives the piece movement, and the sense that what's contained in the snapshots is still happening.

The interactive "Soupkitchen" was only partially installed at the show's opening reception two weeks ago. Artists Edith Abeyta and Charlene Roth provided dozens of bowls and a giant pot of soup; the idea was each visitor could acquire a handmade, signed ceramic bowl, but he or she had to stand in line and eat the soup to get it. The artists took pictures of the participants, then used them to finish the installation.

"There are deep feelings about this theme," Rowland says.



photos courtesy of the Avenue 50 Studio

"La Olvidada" by Abel Alejandro.

"Besides the artists on Skid Row, there are artists going through personal crises, who are facing unemployment. Some of them have dealt with homelessness in their past."

Avenue 50 Studio is a funky, low-tech art space: One side of the building is a gallery, and the other houses offices and the Arroyo Arts Collective, where local artists hang work and hold classes. A stone's throw away, the Gold Line rumbles by, a neighborhood addition Gallegos has mixed feelings about. The gallery is clearly visible to train passengers — she says a Gold Line conductor stopped in recently, curious about the brightly colored building he passed every day. But Gallegos, who rents, says the property owner has made overtures about developing apartments, which would force the art space out. She notes the irony. An obscure location suddenly becomes prime, and a gallery, which happens to be hosting a show about the meaning of home, fears a future without one.

Avenue 50 Studio is at 131 N. Ave. 50 in Highland Park. (323) 258-1435 or www.avenue50studio.com. *Shelter: Coming Home* runs through Dec. 28.