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Hands On — A Public Role in Transit Art

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Los Angeles' Metro Rail system, a 400-mile network of subway and light-rail lines, will connect the region's sprawling neighborhoods in a new way. The arts offer a unique opportunity for those connections to be cultural and spiritual as well as physical.

Artists have worked on more than 60 stations. They have been given broad guidelines and encouraged to explore all aspects of the station. Community participation in the design process is especially important to the MTA because it fosters increased support for the design program; public art also can be a vehicle for tapping peoples' inventiveness, creativity and commitment when designing new public facilities. Several artists have chosen to interact with the community in a manner that is both direct and participatory, focusing their efforts on young people.

Steve Appleton, working on the Harbor Freeway station in South Central L.A., rented a studio just a few blocks from the station. There, he established Community Industrial Arts (CIA), an apprenticeship program that focuses on the interdisciplinary skills needed for careers in art, architecture, engineering and construction.

With the help of teachers from neighboring Locke High School Appleton selected 10 students to work in the CIA program for 10 weeks last summer. Appleton, other artists and a member of the community advisory group taught them computer drafting, photography, mold making, casting and

etching. The students not only helped design and fabricate floor tiles for the station entrance, but also developed other projects, including cast aluminum sculptures and a series of black-and-white photographs.

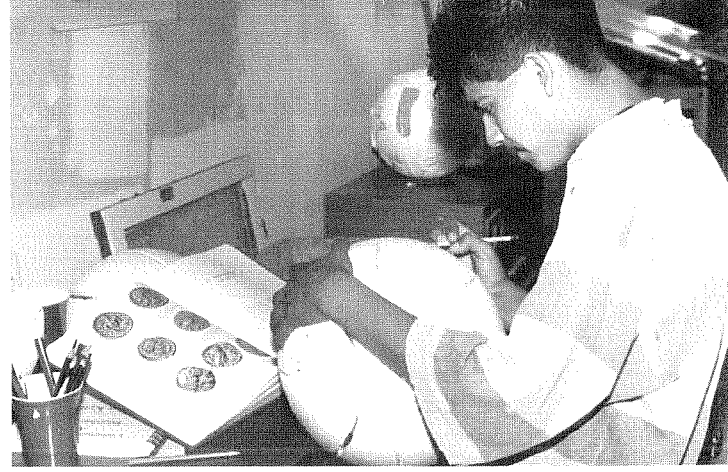
Several students are still working regularly with Appleton, who wants to expand the program and provide ongoing training opportunities for young people. All of the students will return to etch the tiles at the station and help with the finishing touches on this new landmark in their community.

At the Wilmington/Imperial Station, Joe Sam is creating a giant game of "hide and seek." Sixty colorful metal cutouts will play among the forest of concrete gray columns that support this three-level, above-ground station and the freeway above it. He is designing the figures with the help of children from nearby housing projects and schools.

Sam has a particular affinity for working with children. He was involved with the Head Start program for a number of years and he seems to know exactly how to get kids excited about his projects. He organized an intense two-day workshop during which a group of children from the nearby boys and girls club created Foamcore cutouts of their silhouettes, painted them and installed them at the station in a community celebration.

Sam and A-R-T project manager Maya Emsden also developed a coloring book that was distributed to fourth and fifth graders in area schools. Sam and

Emsden gave students an opportunity to work with the silhouettes in the coloring book and to ask questions about what an artist does, particularly for a transit project. The sessions helped open a dialogue about career choices and issues of ownership and responsibility in public spaces. The final figures will contain elements of the ideas these children generated. Just before the work is installed next year, the children's drawings will be exhibited at a nearby shopping mall.



Top: Local high school student during apprenticeship with artist Steve Appleton. Bottom: Student traces outline of artist Joe Sam for "Hide-n-Seek" project.

Photos courtesy Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority A-R-T Program.

