

# People as part of the art process

**O**ne corner of Shoshana Brand's studio holds a wooden folding table full of growing grass, and the top layers of paint and drywall have been scraped off the nearby wall. Bumping out of the plaster on another wall are abstract designs.

Otherwise, the Claremont Graduate University art student's studio holds nearly no art. Her work has hung instead on streetcorners, been plastered on the sides of buildings or strewn across lawns.

She calls it public art and defends her choice of milieu vigorously.

"I like the art to be everywhere and for people to be part of the art process," she says. "I like the fact that it becomes a part of the community...not just to sit in my studio and work on it from beginning to end and instead of putting it in the gallery."

The gallery for her installation piece "Sign and Signature" was the West Hollywood cityscape, where she hung bright, abstract, loosely brush-stroked acrylics on the city's street signs.

At California State University at Northridge, where she spent time pursuing a master's degree in studio art, she painted 28 cement spheres in shades of red and then scattered them on the grass. She called it "The Trail of Yin".

Displayed alongside "Yin" were "The Trail of the Artist", a swath of red felt overlaid in white canvas, laid outside CSUN's art gallery and signed by the school's artists,

**Shoshana Brand**

and "The Puzzled Road", a nearly 8-foot square pattern of acrylic-painted wooden puzzle pieces.

After last fall's attacks in New York and Washington, DC, Ms. Brand hung 70 black balloons on a wall for passersby to pop. Her fellow art students burst balloons with vigor until they read the message underneath—"terror is terror".

And just this month at CSUN, Ms. Brand hung banners of blown-up snail, slug, mouse and gopher-poison labels across the buildings in a commentary about the violence implicit in our culture.

"People react. They ask questions," she says. "You don't think about it when you go to the store and there's all those products...we are people and think that we control the world sometimes."

Once the labels are huge and plastered across the wall, she explains, their messages—"Grant's Kills Ants", "Grant's Kills Gophers"—seem less innocuous.

"The gophers were so cute in the label," she says. "How can they put such a nice gopher there with a flower in his hand and say 'kill'? Think about it."

She plans to run that exhibit in Claremont next September.

Ms. Brand calls her interest in public art a natural outgrowth of her first career, in the film and television industry in Israel, where she was born and lived the first decades of her life.

She left Israel for Los Angeles 12 years ago. She maintains that the film industry here never tempted her, although she worked in it for a short time.

She wanted to do art instead, and so she began sculpting and painting. She found herself working with Hiro Yamagata, the Japanese artist who made millions selling his work on the mass market and then turned to painting flowers on Mercedes Benz Cabriolet motorcars.

She kept a studio in Santa Monica—as if opening a studio immediately makes one an artist, she jokes—sculpted and painted murals.

She came to Claremont in search of a second master's of fine arts degree, this time in art instead of in film and television.

After she graduates in December, she hopes to teach at the college level—and to continue to make public art.

**COURIER photo/Trish Branley**

**h**er next exhibit will be inside a gallery, however, when she shows "Wall Map" at the Kinross Building at the University of California, Los Angeles starting June 1.

Like the installations in her studio, Ms. Brand builds "Wall Map" into the plaster of whatever wall she wants to use as a canvas.

"It's actually a puzzle," she says. "I bought a puzzle of the United States and put it on the wall. I work with spackle around it and use the same paint they used on the wall to cover it."

But the states in "Wall Map" are fragmented, floating apart, their borders widened into gaps.

She calls it a play on the idea of "United We Stand", musing, "This is our fear, right, not to be united".

She talks about "all the crazy things going on in the world right now"—even the tiny village near Haifa where her family still lives has been hit by suicide bombers in the current Intifada.

"On a personal level, yeah, I'm worried," she says. "But I very much feel like a citizen of the world...not only in Israel, all over the world there is terror. It touched me way before 9/11."

"I'm not the kind of artist to just sit in my studio and think about abstract ideas or my own experiences," she says.

Dealing with her fears this year, she installed a piece of art on the CGU campus: plastic eggs filled with dirt and lima beans, meant to be watered.

"Everyone watered it," she says. "I was actually impressed because they really took it seriously and watered it every day, and it grew."

She says she seeks that kind of small victory in her art.

"People ask me sometimes if I think my art will change the world," she says. "But the consequences aren't really the point. If you change something, it's great. If you change the consciousness of one person, it's great."

—Naomi Kresge

*Shoshana Brand's "Wall Map" will be part of "Smoking Mirrors", a display organized by UCLA student art and social action group Cihual 8.*

*The opening reception will run from 9 p.m. to midnight on June 1 at the Kinross Building, located at 11000 Kinross in Westwood. The display will continue for a week before moving to other locations across Los Angeles.*

*Information: (310) 825-6564.*

