Police and Thieves

Featuring work from Gusmano Cesaretti, Meg Cranston, Los Angeles Poverty Department Collective, Amitis Motevalli, Ray Noland a.k.a. CRO, Ben Stone and Arnoldo Vargas

Curated by Karla Diaz and Mario Ybarra Jr.
This show was inspired by the reggae song *Police and Thieves* by Junior Murvin that describes the struggle between cops and robbers from both sides. The subject is something that is often talked about for a long time in Los Angeles, a prominent subject in a city like Los Angeles, which has a history and a strong relationship to police and policing institutions. It is known that this subject is true to different cities all over the world. And we wanted to explore this and how we can have a conversation about it with other artists in different cities. With curator, Allison Peters Quinn’s help from Hyde Park Center, we have been able to create an exchange by bringing artists from both L.A. and Chicago together in this exhibition. The idea is to initiate dialogue and expose images of both cops and robbers in the city. This perspective exposes a conversation of criminalizing youth at an early age.

Arnoldo Vargas’s piece acts as a public intervention piece that asks audiences to reconsider the memorial and re-creating the memorial on sites where people have been killed. The figures chosen by the artist to define “martyr” remind us that there are two sides to the story often fraught with injustices on both sides.

The figures are neither menacing nor comforting and raises questions about what happens simultaneously. The images included in the exhibition are from Los Angeles, Chicago, and Panama. The idea of cops and robbers is blurred, translated, and re-interpreted in different settings, but also in the way the artist prints the images. The text is inserted into this restrictive prison architecture. Developed in LAPD’s workshops, the performance places the performers and public inside an understanding of how the prison system functions: the mental and physical challenges of incarceration and how to endure and recover from it.

A similar concern for engaging the public is seen in *Meg Cranston’s video and photograph, Seated Smiling*, the only performance that has been imprisoned in Thailand on a drug charge since 2007 serving a 29 year sentence. Immersing the viewer in Wong’s experience of being incarcerated, Cranston’s video asks the audience to participate in Wong’s waiting and attempts to shorten his sentence by making every day of his remaining 10, 585 days sentence 30 seconds long. This makes the piece 6 hours long which can be a difficult experience for an audience to bear and watch but an intentional, poignant part of the piece.

Whether it’s a concern for addressing alternative spaces, institutions of power that imprison or restrict freedom, that serve and protect, or simply pose a question that unveils a concern for the criminalized or the criminalizing, with wit, investigation, a focus on intervention and exploration, the artists in this exhibition powerfully speak out to both dynamics of cops and robbers.

Karla Diaz and Mario Ybarra Jr. Curators of *Police and Thieves*