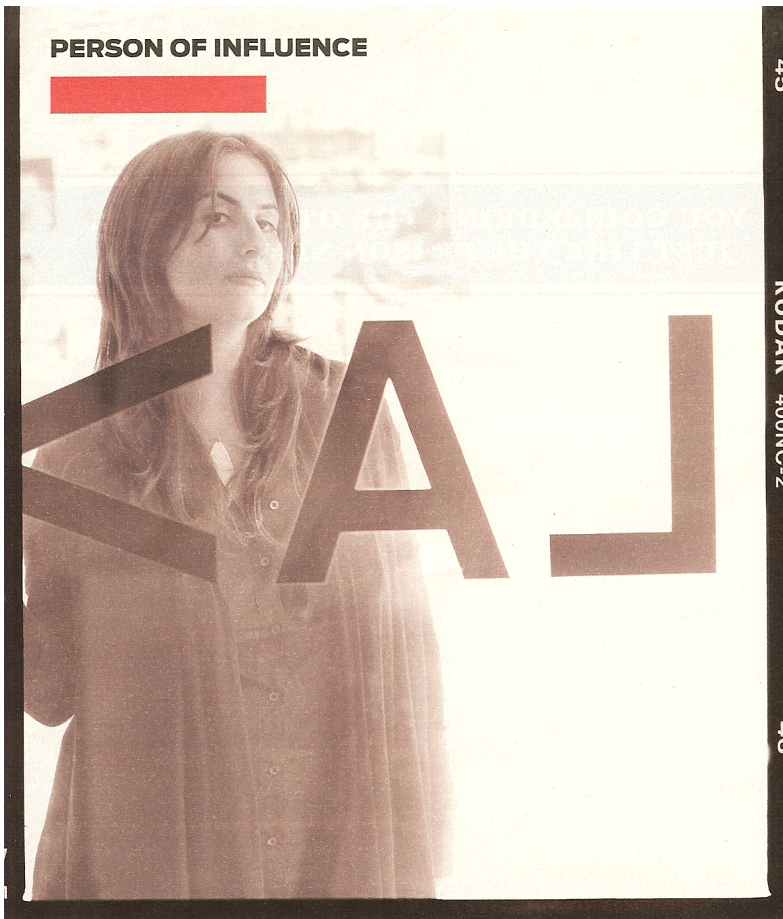


PERSON OF INFLUENCE



Public Art Angel

Lauri Firstenberg gets art out of museums and into the streets

BY ELIZABETH KHURI

HOW IT WORKS: Lauri Firstenberg founded the nonprofit LAXART two years ago to help both new and midcareer artists produce and showcase their work. Artists who collaborate with LAXART have had their work installed in LAXART's gallery-style space on La Cienega Boulevard and as temporary projects atop billboards, across freeway walls and, in the case of Joel Tauber, surrounded by pavement in the Rose Bowl parking lot. After Firstenberg picks the artists, the organization raises funds to produce the work, finds the site and helps cut the red tape that often prevents artists from producing bold public projects. "We try to help them realize their idea; often it's the first time an artist is working in a public space," the 35-year-old Firstenberg says.

tion, visit www.laxart.org.) Firstenberg asked artists to curate the and select lesser-known and established artists to participate as a way to art community together. The money to be raised "helps us continue ahead to the next project," Firstenberg says. Those plans include sculptor Jedediah Caesar—known for entombing trash from his st gantic lumps of resin—to create a large abstract sculpture in a named public place, and helping photographic artist Walead Besi a sculptural piece with audio elements inside a local mall. ■

Elizabeth Khuri is assistant style editor of West.

WHY IT MATTERS: Grants often flow once they've established themselves with known dealer and museum exhibits. But at that point can be arduous. LAXART tries by giving young artists maximum exposure. For example, it gave conceptual artist Ruben known for converting a tortilla van into art gallery—his first solo show in its gallery last year, and helped him

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permission to create a wall along the 10 in East L.A. Gallerist Vielmetter decided to sent Ochoa immediately the exhibition, and he launched a solo show on Sept. 8. "When I saw that he did for LAXART, that, for me, was through work both in scale and ambition, conceptually layered in an interesting way the LAXART exhibition, Ochoa also was a six-month residency at the International & Curatorial Program in Midtown Manhattan was one of four artists chosen for a program by two arts foundations, two private dealers National Endowment for the Arts (an organization sometimes tight with money for fine artists).

WHY YOU SHOULD CARE: Because Firstenberg's efforts, art becomes part of your commute, something you see when you're at a traffic light on La Cienega or pass a UCLA game. "The interaction of art in landscape, like encountering art on a billboard on a wall, is a component of most internalities," she says. "Our location seems to be situated it emphasizes heavy pedestrian traffic and commuter traffic, and helps expand art for Los Angeles." Vielmetter says Firstenberg also adds credibility to the Culver City art which the LAXART gallery is a part. "We have people like Lauri who do this kind of work show art that is important and pushes the and is cutting edge, projects that are somewhat difficult for younger galleries to pull off financially. And because they're temporary, she can faster," Vielmetter says.

WHAT'S NEXT: On Nov. 4, LAXART's silent auction, presented by Hermès, featuring by established and emerging artists. (For