

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Leimert Park Artwalk

Jade Miller · Thursday, July 28th, 2011

Every last Sunday of the month, it is not a surprise to see Leimert Park – Los Angeles's center of the African-American arts scene – bustling with traffic featuring a variety of people from all over the city. Whether they are vendors, artists, musicians, residents or art lovers, they come from near and far to experience the welcoming atmosphere of the Leimert Park Artwalk that fills the area surrounding 43rd Place and Degnan Boulevard each month. The presence of each person there, despite their own reasons for attending, is a representation of the overall support of the art, music, fashion and culture we have as a community.

The Leimert Park Artwalk offers a wide array of activities that are sure to please and occupy a person of any age. Storefronts are transformed into exhibitions of art pieces and a marketplace where one can search for inexpensive hand-made jewelry or vintage clothing. The park is filled with people who have come to enjoy the sounds of the drum circle and maybe even a plate from one of the many food vendors. Children enjoy the company of one another and partake in the arts and craft activities available to them.

Talented performers occupy the Kaos Network's stage while an enthusiastic and responsive crowd squeezed into a spot on the floor. The streets of Leimert are also filled with others who are simply indulging in the inviting ambiance of the occasion. Causerie, music and laughter compose the soundtrack of the afternoon. When surrounded by so many beautiful faces and friendly personalities, I couldn't have felt more at home.

There were many captivating people I came in contact with, including a man named Jabari who is one of the vendors in Leimert Park every Sunday. My friends and I happened to walk up and overhear his conversation with a woman where he was explaining the meaning and significance of the ankh symbol. She was inquiring, perhaps because much of his jewelry displayed the symbol, along with peace signs and the eye of Horus.

We eventually conversed with him ourselves, and he encouraged us to continue to come to the park and to invite our friends. His knowledge of history and the culture of African Americans was very refreshing. Jabari is just one of many au fait people who might enlighten you with profound wisdom at the Leimert Park Artwalk.

After engaging in only two artwalks myself, I have a newfound respect and appreciation for the passion and dedication of the artists and musicians. Being in the midst of so many creative and enthusiastic people is a very different experience. It's inspiring. It sort of mitigates the dullness associated with feeling obliged to abandon our true interests for the sake of being "financially

stable."

The current state of the economy has put added pressure on people young and old to choose between what they're passionate about and what will allow them to support themselves and their families. So, I personally find it reassuring to see so many people doing what they love to do rather than what pays the bills. It is a tough decision to make, when you're a college student who is constantly being asked what you want to do with your life.

Seeing so many young people athirst to embracing their culture was somewhat surprising. It seems as though embracing the African American culture has become rare for many young people today. I can attest to this because as a resident of Leimert Park and an African American youth, not once did the thought of going to walk around the park cross my mind. It wasn't until I learned about the Leimert Park Artwalk that I decided to gradually immerse myself in the festivities that take place there. Just from going to the artwalks, I can say that I am more interested in the culture. Overall, they are an excellent chance for youth like me, as well as others of any age, to become acquainted with our own history. The unity, peace, love and community aspects of the event give it the comforting nature that keeps people wanting to return each month.

The Leimert Park Artwalk takes place in the Leimert Park Village every last Sunday of the month from 2 to 8 p.m., and the next one is this coming Sunday, July 31. It is an all-ages, free event with activities for everyone. Come out and support the artists, musicians and vendors.

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