

The Hang Twenty PROJECT

A Surfboard Invitational

Shawn K. Smith



On July 9, 2004, a small, eclectic beach town in southern California found its name on the front page of the *Los Angeles Times*, and as most Hermosa Beach residents commented, "It was above the fold no less." With readers reaching into the millions, what began as a small public art project between the local education and arts foundations quickly became an homage to a California endless summer about art and quality of life.

The *Los Angeles Times* dubbed it, "Beach Town Catches Public Art Wave," and most tourists who visited found themselves enjoying a little bit of art, surf, sunshine, and summer fun. The mission of this project was to encourage art in the local schools and in the community. Twenty renowned artists were selected to create art on a very unique canvas—a surfboard. The artists included Irish animator-turned-painter, Brian Boylan; Margaret McAlpin, an eighty-two-year-old grandmother who was a surfer in her youth; and Neal and Dawn Von Flue, a husband-and-wife team who design everything from Web pages to murals. Cleverly called, "Hanging Twenty" (a play on surf lingo for Hang Ten), the exhibit placed the twenty surfboards throughout town at local businesses.

Lasting Partnerships

The project was the brainchild of members of the Hermosa Beach Education Foundation, a local teacher, and the Hermosa Arts Foundation.

Together these organizations met throughout the year to plan and implement the public art project. Even the kids created their own version of surf art during an after school class.

The partnership raised over \$38,000 for the two organizations—and all of it earmarked for the arts! People from Hermosa Beach, as well as those from all over California purchased these unique artworks. Many art dealers purchased boards as well. The partnerships extended to the business community, too. Selected local businesses displayed the surf art in their storefront windows. The event drew many tourists throughout the summer and contributed to the economic health of the community.

The Chamber of Commerce and even the town's mayor were present at the unveiling of the "Surf Art Map," one of many events the project hosted that summer.

Culture Builders

The arts have a very unique way of creating and building culture. This art project allowed many community members to collaborate in a social environment. Collaboration was a key component to the success of this story. So much so, that on the day the surfboards went on public display, the *Los Angeles Times* covered the story. And one week before, there was a special preview at a local gallery. The

event sold out and many deemed it the hottest ticket in town that summer.

The project also demonstrated the values of this community; a community that includes the arts as an important part of schooling and of the cultural health of the public. The superintendent of schools, Dr. Sharon McClain, enjoyed the event so much that she purchased one of the original surfboards, and it is now on display in the district office.

Values were also evident in the project's metaphors and silent symbols. The theme Hanging Twenty, as well as the surfboard canvas, provided

shared meanings for community members all summer as they enjoyed the surf art throughout their tiny beach town.

The arts were able to

tap into the way things were done in Hermosa Beach. Theorists of culture often define it as the way we do things around here. ☺

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WEB LINK

www.hermosaarts.org/SurfinHermosaApp.pdf

www.vonflueart.com/hang20/index.htm