

# Graffiti as art?

By John Farrell

**Y**OU'VE seen graffiti scrawled on walls.

Maybe not in your neighborhood, if you are lucky, but certainly on your commute to work, or traveling down a freeway. You can't avoid it, much as you'd like to.

It is communication, yes, because you can't avoid noticing the words and letters. But art? No way.

Still, admit it, occasionally you'll see something painted on a wall or a railway car that is an exceptional creation: a colorful and powerful image that makes you wonder why the person who made it is wasting talent and spray paint on criminal conduct.

You don't want to call it art, don't want to dignify it with any kind of respect. But the image, much as you hate to admit it, is powerful.

The experience is almost universal, a part of the complex experience of living in a vibrant city. Most people just shrug and let the curious contradiction go.

But a few have done something about it.

For more than eight years now, the Lady Between the Lines Art Agency in Alhambra, founded by Jeannette M. Miller, has recognized there's something more to street art than vandalism. They have supported and encouraged a number of young artists who

began in the streets but who have graduated from spray paint and concrete to paint and canvas, and from criminal prosecution to artistic acclaim.

And, as part of the Los Angeles County-Wide Arts Open House they are offering everyone who has ever wondered about urban art a chance to learn how it has grown. Saturday at the State Playhouse at Cal State Los Angeles two of those artists, Alex Zendejas and David Martinez and special guest speaker Yvonne Cole Meo will explore an eight-year probe into the subject in "The Making of Urban Hidden Literature Art: Early Graffiti Transformations onto Oil and Canvas," a lecture and slide show that begins at 1 p.m.

Martinez and Zendejas both started as street artists, but moved to more traditional forms through the involve-

ment of the Lady between the Lines Art Agency. Their involvement has brought many other artists into the program, artists who want to create what they now call Urban Hidden Literature Art, a name created in part to defend against the pejorative nature of the word "graffiti." Exhibits around the Southland and elsewhere have been enthusiastically received.

After the lecture the IBY Fine Art and Antiques Gallery at 9865 Little Santa Monica Blvd. in Beverly Hills will hold a reception in honor of Zendejas and Martinez from 6 to 9 p.m. Works by those two artists and many others will be on display at the gallery.

**Guest speaker will be Yvonne Cole Meo who studied the subject of graffiti for eight years.**

## PREVIEW

**What:** "The Making of Urban Hidden Literature Art: Early Graffiti Transformations onto Oil and Canvas"

**Where:** State Playhouse, Cal State L.A., 5151 State University Drive, Los Angeles

**When:** 1-3 p.m. Saturday

