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Images examine reality of homelessness

Exhibit compares current social issues to Depression Era

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'Bread Line,' by Claire Leighton, can be seen as part of the 'Hobos to Street People' exhibit at the Loveland Museum/Gallery. / Courtesy of Loveland Museum/Gallery

Written by **Stacy Nick**

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While the current common image of homelessness is a woman pushing a shopping cart down the street or a man sleeping in a cardboard box, the plight of the homeless is much broader than that, said Art Hazelwood.

That's why the California-based artist and homeless activist curated the exhibit "Hobos to Street People," now on display at the Loveland Museum/Gallery. The show is Hazelwood's way of drawing attention to the plight of the homeless as well as connecting the dots between the homelessness of the Depression Era of the 1930s to the that of the street people of today.

"It struck me as a good way to address the issue — with art," said Hazelwood, who worked with historians Charles Wollenberg, Paul Borden and M. Lee Stone to create the traveling exhibition. "I wanted to show the parallels between the past and the present."

Segmented into four categories — including a section that looks at both rural and urban homelessness and one that looks at the daily realities of the homeless — the show examines a situational range of homelessness. "The most common image of homelessness is someone pushing around a shopping cart," he said. "I wanted to broaden people's ideas about what homelessness is."

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One section of the exhibit focuses particularly on the idea of displacement and rootlessness, ranging from couch-surfing families looking to find footing after the housing bubble burst to the revolving door of returning veterans. One example is Sandow Birk's contemporary piece, "GI Homecoming," which conveys a returning vet's homecoming via a Norman Rockwell style without the utopian ending.



'Mother and Children on the Road,' by Dorothea Lange, can be seen as part of the Loveland Museum/Gallery exhibit 'Dorothea Lange: Precarious Lives,' which is running in conjunction with 'Hobos to Street People.' Both exhibits examine artists' responses to homelessness from the New Deal to the present. / Courtesy of Loveland Museum/Gallery

There are many situations that make people vulnerable to homelessness, Hazelwood said, adding that it's not just about looking at the end of the scale of poverty.

The exhibition also includes a section that examines the adversarial role that artists undertook in the face of government and societal indifference to their plight. Jacob Burke's "The Lord will Provide" features a protestor holding a sign that says "Work or bread" on it being arrested. In contrast, a poster by artists and activist Jesus Barraza reads "How many people do you need to start a revolution? There are 15,000 homeless in San Francisco. Is that enough?"

'Hobos to Street People' and 'Dorothea Lange: Precarious Lives'

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The biggest obvious difference between the Depression and today is the government's response to it, said Hazelwood, whose work, including a graph that shows the diminishing level of government aid provided to the homeless in the past 30 years, also is featured in the show. "Austerity is the new religion," he added. "Before homelessness was a systemic issue, but now it is seen as a personal problem."

The show runs in conjunction with the photo exhibit "Dorothea Lange: Precarious Lives." Lange's portraits of the homeless, in particular the rural and migrant families of the Dust Bowl Era, helped to give a face to the forgotten, said Loveland Museum/Gallery curator Maureen Corey.

"Precarious Lives" includes 28 of Lange's groundbreaking images from the 1930s. A portrait photographer in California until the Great Depression, Lange turned her lens from the studio to the street, working with the federal Resettlement Administration (now the Farm Security Administration). Her stark images, showcased in the pages of popular magazines like Life, became icons of the era.

One of the most striking elements to Lange's photos is that even though they were shot in the 1930s, they feel as if they could have been shot today, Corey said.

"They are the faces of people that you could know now," Corey said. "That's what makes these photos so relatable.

"She looks like someone I could have seen walking down the street," added Corey, motioning to the road-weary migrant mother



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in Lange's photo "Mother and children on the road."

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