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## Local Voices



[Janet Alvarado Dodson](#)

## Changing Los Angeles: SOUPporting the Arts

Posted on January 26, 2012 at 12:33 pm

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### Art Soup

Chef James Graham Credit Cathi Milligan

It was a dark and cloudy night.

It had rained Saturday morning on [Peter Bedard's](#) dauntless if damp tree-planting crew across town. As soon as Nate Hayward of Council District 14 arranged for the rain to stop, the resolute [Los Angeles Yarn Bombers](#) were hard at work covering a traffic box, at York and Avenue 51, putting

arms on a nearby tree, and installing a meter cozy in anticipation of their presentation that night.

Also hard at work was [restaurant Ba](#) Chef James Graham. For months, James could be found nose deep in plaster, or wielding a pickaxe in the slice of Elsa's Bakery at the corner of Ave 51 and York that he is transforming into a cozy and amiable [French bistro](#) sometime soon.

Don't ask him when. Please.

But, on Saturday afternoon he was chopping onions and herbs, preparing two soups for Los Angeles' first Art Soup Night. It was his first actual cooking in his almost complete kitchen. His face was transformed, illuminated and content. Clearly art had already begun. Anthony and I were arranging tables and chairs to accommodate the overflow crowd we were expecting.

Cathi Milligan, Director of [NELAart](#), and glass magician of [The Glass Studio](#) on York Boulevard, also directs the [Second Saturday NELA Art Walk](#). She has begun expanding the scope of NELAart with Soup Night. Highland Park filmmaker Anthony Deptula brought the idea to Cathi. It is a micro-grant for artists using community crowd funding and soup. Anthony first encountered this idea in Detroit. Art patrons buy a ticket for soup and a vote. Four artists in search of funding present their projects, and after the presentations the soup-eaters vote on their favorite. All the admission dollars go to the winning artist.

At 7 p.m. the art patrons arrived clutching their hard-to-get tickets. Once seated by the calm and professional Sharia and Monique, they spooned up the rich and deeply satisfying Ba soup--chicken or potato leek--with a fresh roll from Elsa's. [Jolino Beserra](#), an architectural mosaic artist, presented images of the five-foot tall sculpture of a dog on a ball commissioned by the [Hermon Dog Park](#).

Arzu Arda Kosar and the [Los Angeles Yarn Bombers](#) talked about the large-scale architectural knitting they want to construct with the help of Senior Citizens. [Saskia Wilson-Brown](#) showed one of the heart-rending personal stories she is [filming](#), hidden in our everyday lives. Christopher Dibble brought "[Grow](#)," photographs of our gay and lesbian elders not often seen, deserving of respect, and appreciation for their struggle simply to be. The Art Patrons of the Soup chose Beserra. Collectively their admission provided funding towards completion of the commission by the Hermon Dog Park.

Several venues are clamoring to host the February NELA Art Soup LA. There was a flood of applications and inquiries from artists for the January Soup, and the tickets were gone in less than a week. Consequently NELA and Art Soup LA are thinking about a larger venue for February. The decision will be made this week, and the call for applications will go out immediately. [Write to nelaartmicrogrant@gmail.com for more information.](mailto:nelaartmicrogrant@gmail.com)

Every patron I spoke with described the intimate community feeling and the delightful, lively, funny and surprising presentations--each one personal and worth supporting. The audience understood immediately that the event was about the art. The delicious soup and the communal conversations were a bonus. They were rapt watching the artists passionately describe the work so close to their hearts. Smiling and unwilling to leave, they continued their conversations as the chairs were being folded. In February there will be four more inspiring artists, and the night will again provide a community adventure in support of art.

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